

Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11

LYNN SPIGEL
Northwestern University

AFTER THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT had to reinvent their place in U.S. life and culture. The de rigueur violence of mass media—both news and fiction—no longer seemed business as usual. While Hollywood usually defends its mass-destruction ethos with claims to “free speech,” constitutional rights, and industry-wide discretion (à la ratings systems), in the weeks following September 11 the industry exhibited (whether for sincere or cynical reasons) a new will toward “tastefulness” as potentially trauma-inducing films like Warner’s *Collateral Damage* were pulled from release. On television, violent movies also came under network scrutiny. USA canceled its prime-time run of *The Siege* (which deals with Arab terrorists who plot to bomb New York). At TBS violence-packed films like *Lethal Weapon* were replaced with family fare like *Look Who’s Talking*. TNT replaced its 1970s retro lineup of *Superman*, *King Kong*, and *Carrie* with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Grease*, and *Jaws* (although exactly why the blood-sucking shark in *Jaws* seemed less disturbing than the menstruating teen in *Carrie* already begs questions about exactly what constitutes “terror” in the minds of Hollywood executives).¹

Lynn Spigel is a professor in the School of Communications at Northwestern University. She is author of *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Duke University Press, 2001) and *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 1992). She is currently writing *High and Low TV: Modern Art and Commercial Television, 1950–1970* (University of Chicago Press) and conducting a new book project on new media and smart homes. Her co-edited anthology *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* is forthcoming Fall 2004 with Duke University Press.

But it wasn't just the "hard" realities of violence that came under self-imposed censorship. Light entertainment and "diversions" of all kinds also didn't feel right. Humorists Dave Letterman, Jay Leno, Craig Kilborn, Conan O'Brien, and Jon Stewart met the late-night audience with dead seriousness. While *Saturday Night Live* did return to humor, its jokes were officially sanctioned by an opening act that included a somber performance by Paul Simon, the entire New York Fire Department, and Mayor Giuliani himself. When producer Lorne Michaels asked the mayor if it was okay to be funny, Giuliani joked, "Why start now?" (implicitly informing viewers that it was, in fact, okay to laugh). In the midst of the new sincerity, numerous critics summarily declared that the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center had brought about the "end of irony."²

Despite such bombastic declarations, however, many industry leaders were actually in a profound state of confusion about just what it was that the public wanted. Even while industry leaders were eager to censor trauma-inducing images of any kind, video outlets reported that, when left to their own discretion, consumers were eagerly purchasing terrorist flicks like *The Siege* and *The Towering Inferno*. One video retailer noted an "uneasy" feeling about consumer desire for films like *The Towering Inferno*, and one store owner even "moved such videos so they were arranged with only the spines showing, obscuring the covers."³ Meanwhile, Internet companies worried about the hundreds of vulgar domain names for which people applied in the hopes of setting up Web sites. One major domain name reseller halted auctions for several names it considered tasteless, including "NewYorkCarnage.com."⁴ As these cases suggest, the media industries had to balance their own public image as discriminating custodians of culture with the vagaries of public taste.

Given its historical status as a regulated private industry ideally meant to operate in the "public interest," television was the medium hardest hit by this conflict between maintaining the image of "public servant" and the need to cater to the public taste (or at least to what advertisers think the public likes). Getting back to the normal balance between its public service and entertainment/commercial functions posed problems for broadcasters and cablers alike.⁵ In the midst of the turmoil, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and CBS postponed the Emmy Award ceremonies twice.

To be sure, television executives' nervous confusion was rooted in the broader havoc that 9/11 wreaked on television—not just as an

industry but also as “a whole way of life.”⁶ Most fundamentally, on September 11, the everydayness of television itself was suddenly disrupted by news of something completely “alien” to the usual patterns of domestic TV viewing.⁷ The nonstop commercial-free coverage, which lasted for a full week on major broadcast networks and cable news networks, contributed to a sense of estrangement from ordinary life, not simply because of the unexpected nature of the attack itself but also because television’s normal routines—its everyday schedule and ritualized flow—had been disordered. As Mary Ann Doane has argued about television catastrophes more generally, not only television’s temporal flow, but also its central narrational agency breaks down in moments of catastrophe.⁸ We are in a world where narrative comes undone and where the “real” seems to have no sense of meaning beyond repetition of the horrifying event itself. This, she claims, in turn threatens to expose the underlying catastrophe of all TV catastrophes—the breakdown of capitalism, the end of the cash flow, the end of the logic of consumption on which U.S. television is predicated.

By the weekend of September 15, television news anchors began to tell us that it was their national duty to return to the “normal” everyday schedule of television entertainment, a return meant to coincide with Washington’s call for a return to normalcy (and, hopefully, normal levels of consumerism). Of course, for the television industry, resuming the normal TV schedule also meant a return to commercial breaks and, therefore, TV’s very sustenance. Already besieged by declining ad revenues before the attacks, the television industry lost an estimated \$320 million in advertising revenue in the week following the attacks.⁹ So, even while the media industries initially positioned entertainment and commercials as being “in bad taste,” just one week after the attacks the television networks discursively realigned commercial entertainment with the patriotic goals of the nation.¹⁰ In short—and most paradoxically—entertainment and commercialism were rearticulated as television’s “public service.”

By September 27, Jack Valenti, president and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America, gave this “commercialism as patriotism” ethos an official stamp of approval. In a column for *Variety*, he wrote: “Here in Hollywood we must continue making our movies and our TV programs. For a time, during this mourning period, we need to be sensitive to how we tell a story. But in time—and that time will

surely come—life will go on, must go on. We in Hollywood have to get on with doing our creative work. . . . The country needs what we create.”¹¹ Valenti’s message was part of a much older myth of show business—a myth that ran through countless Depression-era and World War II musicals—a myth of transcendence in which showbiz folks put aside their petty differences and join together in patriotic song. If in the 1940s this myth of transcendence emboldened audiences for wartime sacrifice, now, in the twenty-first century, this transcendent myth of show business is oddly conjoined with national mandates for a return to “normal” consumer pleasures. In a bizarrely Baudrillardian moment, President Bush addressed the nation, begging us to return to normal life by getting on planes and taking our families to Disneyland.¹²

In fact, despite the initial tremors, American consumer culture and television in particular did return to normal (or at least a semblance of it) in a remarkably short span of time. Yet, while many people have noted this, the process by which this happened and the extent to which it was achieved beg further consideration. Media scholarship on 9/11 and the U.S. attacks in Afghanistan has focused primarily on print and television news coverage. This important scholarship focuses on the narrative and mythic “framing” of the events; the nationalistic jingoism (for example, the use of flag graphics on news shows); the relative paucity of alternative views in mainstream venues—at least in the immediate weeks following the attacks; the role of alternative news platforms, especially the Internet; competing global news outlets, particularly Al Jazeera; and the institutional and commercial pressure that has led to “infotainment.”¹³ Despite its significant achievements, however, the scholarly focus on news underestimates (indeed, it barely considers) the way the “reality” of 9/11 was communicated across the flow of television’s genres, including its so-called entertainment genres.¹⁴ The almost singular focus on news fails to capture the way television worked to process fear (even fear trumped up by the media) and return the public to “ordinary” life (including routine ways of watching TV). The return to normal has to be seen from this wider view, for it was enacted not just through the narrative frames of news stories but also through the repositioning of audiences back into television’s fictive time and places—its familiar series, well-known stars, favorite characters, and ritualized annual events (such as the Emmy Awards).

In the following pages, I explore how an assortment of television genres—dramatic series, talk shows, documentaries, special “event”

TV, and even cartoons—channeled the nation back to normalcy—or at least to the normal flows of television and consumer culture. I am particularly interested in how these genres relied on nationalist myths of the American past and the enemy/“Orient.” But I also question the degree to which nationalist myths can sustain the “narrowcast” logic of today’s multichannel television systems (and the more general movement of audiences across multiple media platforms). In other words, I want to interrogate the limits of nationalist myths in the postnetwork, multichannel, and increasingly global media systems.

Admittedly, the fate of nationalism in contemporary media systems is a huge question that requires perspectives from more than one field of inquiry. (For example, we would need to explore the impact of deregulation and media conglomeration, the dispersal of audiences across media platforms, competition among global media news/entertainment outlets, relations between local and global media flows, audience and interpretive reception contexts, and larger issues of national identity and subjectivity.) My goal here is not to provide exhaustive answers to all of these questions (obviously no one essay could do so), but rather to open up some points of interrogation by looking at post-9/11 media industry strategies, the discourses of the entertainment trade journals, and especially at the textual and narrative logic of television programs that channeled the nation back to commercial TV “as usual.”

History Lessons after 9/11

Numerous critics have commented on the way that the attacks of 9/11 were perceived as an event completely outside of and alien to any other horror that ever happened anywhere. As James Der Derian notes, as a consequence of this rhetoric of American exceptionalism, “9/11 quickly took on an *exceptional ahistoricity*” as even many of the most astute critics refused to place the events in a political or social context from which they might be understood. Der Derian argues that when history was evoked in nonstop news coverage of destruction and loss, it appeared as nostalgia and analog, “mainly in the sepia tones of the Second World War—to prepare America for the sacrifice and suffering that lay ahead.”¹⁵ But, at least after the initial news coverage of which Der Derian speaks, history was actually marshaled in a much more contradictory field of statements and images that filled the airwaves and

ushered audiences back—not just toward nostalgic memories of World War II sacrifice—but also toward the mandates of contemporary consumer culture. On television these “contradictory” statements and images revolved around the paradox of the medium’s twin roles as advertiser and public servant.

In the week following 9/11, television’s transition back to normal consumer entertainment was enacted largely through recourse to historical pedagogy that ran through a number of television genres, from news to documentaries to daytime talk shows to prime-time drama. The histories evoked were both familiar and familiarizing tales of the “American experience” as newscasters provided a stream of references to classroom histories, including, for example, the history of U.S. immigration, Pearl Harbor, and Vietnam.¹⁶ They mixed these analogies to historical events with allusions to the history of popular culture, recalling scenes from disaster film blockbusters, science fiction movies, and war films and even referencing previous media events, from the assassination of JFK to the death of Princess Diana. Following 24/7 “real time” news strategies that CNN developed in 1991’s Gulf War, major news networks provided a host of “infotainment” techniques that have over the past decade become common to war reporting (i.e., fast-paced “MTV” editing, computerized/game-style images, slick graphics, digitized sound effects, banter among “experts,” and catchy slogans).¹⁷ On September 12, CNN titled its coverage “The Day After” (which was also the title of the well-known 1980s made-for-TV nuclear disaster movie). NBC sported the slogan “America Strikes Back”—based, of course, on the *Star Wars* trilogy. Meanwhile the FBI enlisted the television show *America’s Most Wanted* to help in the hunt for terrorists.¹⁸ As we searched for familiar scripts, the difference between real wars and “made-for-TV” wars hardly mattered. History had become, to use Michel de Certeau’s formulation, a heterology of science and fiction.¹⁹

But what did this turn to familiar historical narratives provide? Why the sudden appeal of history? Numerous scholars, from Roland Barthes to Marita Sturken, have analyzed the ways in which history and memory serve to produce narratives of the nation. This work has shown how media (from advertising to film to television to music) play a central role in conjuring up a sense of national belonging and community.²⁰ Certainly, after 9/11, the media’s will to remember was connected to the resuscitation of national culture in a country heretofore

divided by culture wars and extreme political partisanship. For the culture industries, however, the turn to history was not only connected to the resuscitation of nationalism; history was also connected to the parallel urge to restore the business routines and marketing practices of contemporary consumer media culture.

At the most basic level, for television executives who were nervous about offending audiences, history was a solution to a programming dilemma. History, after all, occupies that most sought-after realm of “good taste.” It is the stuff of PBS, the Discovery Channel, the History Channel—it signifies a “habitus” of educated populations, of “quality” TV, of public service generally. History’s “quality” appeal was especially important in the context of numerous critical attacks on television’s lack of integrity that ran through industry trade journals and the popular press after 9/11. For example, Louis Chunovic, a reporter for the trade journal *Television Week*, wrote: “In the wake of the terrorist attack on the United States, it’s hard to believe Americans once cared who would win *Big Brother 2* or whether Anne Heche is crazy. And it’s hard to believe that as recently as two weeks ago, that’s exactly the kind of pabulum, along with the latest celebrity/politician sex/murder/kidnaping scandal, that dominated television news.” Chunovic therefore argued, “We cannot afford to return to the way things were.”²¹ Ironically, however, the industry’s post-9/11 upgrade to quality genres—especially historical documentaries—actually facilitated the return to the way things were. Historical documentaries served a strategic role in the patriotic transition back to “normalcy”—that is, to commercial entertainment and consumer culture.

Let’s take, for example, ABC’s programming strategy on Saturday, September 15. On that day, ABC became the first major network to return to a semblance of normal televisual flow. Newscaster Peter Jennings presented a children’s forum, which was followed by an afternoon lineup of historical documentaries about great moments of the twentieth century. The lineup included episodes on Charles Lindbergh, the Apollo crew and the moon landing, and a documentary on the U.S. press in Hitler’s Europe. Interestingly, given the breakdown in surveillance, aviation, and communication technologies that enabled the attacks, all of the chosen histories were about great achievements of great men using great technologies, especially transportation and communications technologies.²²

Meanwhile, from an economic point of view, these historical documentaries were first and foremost part of the contemporary network business strategy that industry people refer to as “repurposing.” The documentaries were reruns repackaged from a previous ABC series narrated by Jennings and now “repurposed” for patriotism. This is not to say that Jennings or anyone else at ABC was intentionally trying to profit from disaster. Certainly, Jennings’s forum for children provided a public service. But, as anyone who studies the history of U.S. television knows, the logic of capitalism always means that public service and public relations are flip sides of the same coin. In this case, the public service gesture of running historical documentaries also served to transition audiences from TV news discourse and live reportage back into prerecorded narrative series. Similarly, with an even more bizarre resonance, on the evening of September 15th NBC ran a special news report on *Dateline* followed by a rerun of the made-for-TV movie *Growing Up Brady*.

More generally, history was integral to the transition back to entertainment series programs. On October 3, 2001, NBC’s *The West Wing*, one of television’s leading quality series, preempted its scheduled season premiere to air a quickly drafted episode titled “Isaac and Ishmael.” On the one hand, the episode (which teaches audiences about the situation in the Middle East) was clearly an earnest attempt by the cast and Creator/Executive Producer Aaron Sorkin (who wrote the script) to use television as a form of political and historical pedagogy.²³ On the other hand, the episode was also entirely consistent with contemporary business promotional strategies. Like the ABC strategy of repurposing, the NBC network followed the business strategy of “stunting”—or creating a stand-alone episode that attracts viewers by straying from the series architecture (the live *ER* is a classic example of the technique). In this case, *The West Wing* was in a particularly difficult position—for perhaps more than any other network series, it derives its “quality” appeal from its “timely relevance” and deep, if melodramatic, realism. (The series presents itself as a kind of parallel White House universe that runs simultaneously with everyday goings-on in Washington.)²⁴

The credit sequence begins with successive headshots of cast members speaking to the audience in direct address (and in their celebrity personae). Martin Sheen welcomes viewers and announces that this episode is not the previously scheduled season premiere. In a subsequent headshot, another cast member even refers to the episode as

“a storytelling aberration,” signaling its utter discontinuity from the now routinely serialized/cumulative narrative structure of contemporary prime-time “quality” genres. Meanwhile, other cast members variously thank the New York Fire and Police Departments, while still others direct our attention to a phone number at the bottom of the screen that viewers can call to donate money to disaster relief and victim funds. In this sense, the episode immediately asks audiences to imagine themselves foremost as citizens engaged in an interactive public/media sphere. Nevertheless, this “public service” ethos is embroidered in the televisual logic of publicity. The opening credit sequence ends with cast members promoting the new fall season by telling audiences what kinds of plots to expect on upcoming episodes. The final “teaser” comes from a female cast member, Janel Moloney, who hypes the fall season by promising that her character will have a love interest in future shows.

After this promise of titillating White House sex, the episode transitions back to its public service discourse. Essentially structured as a teach-in, the script follows a group of high school students touring the White House and caught in the west wing after a terrorist bomb threat. Attempting to calm the nerves of the students, various cast members lecture this imaginary high school class about the history of U.S.–Middle East relations. In an early segment, Josh Lyman, a White House “spin doctor,” teaches the frightened students about terrorism and Middle East animosity toward the West. After a wide-eyed female student asks, “Why is everyone trying to kill us?” Josh moves to the blackboard, where he begins his history lesson. While he admits that the United States is somewhat to blame (he mentions economic sanctions, occupation of Arab lands, and the U.S. abandonment of Afghanistan), he says all of this at such rapid-fire speed that there is no in-depth consideration of the issues. Instead, the scene derails itself from its “teaching” mission by resorting to the colonialist rhetoric of “curiosities.” The scene ends with Josh telling the students of his outrage at the cultural customs of Islamic fundamentalists. The familiar list of horrors—from the fact that women are made to wear a veil to the fact that men can’t cheer freely at soccer games—redirects the episode away from ethics toward an ethnocentric celebration of American cultural superiority.²⁵ Josh concludes by reminding the students that, unlike Islamic fundamentalists, Americans are free to cheer anything they like at football games, and American women can even be astronauts (figs. 1, 2).



Figure 1. High school students trapped in the White House, *The West Wing*, October 3, 2001.

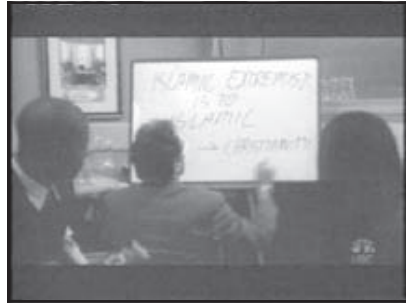


Figure 2. Josh teaches students about Islamic fundamentalism, *The West Wing*, October 3, 2001.

In this regard, the episode uses historical pedagogy to solidify American national unity *against* the “enemy” rather than to encourage any real engagement with Islam, the ethics of U.S. international policy, or the consequences of the then-impending U.S. bomb strikes. Moreover, because the episode’s teach-in lectures are encompassed within a more overarching melodramatic rescue narrative (the terrorist bomb threat in the White House), all of the lessons the students (and by proxy, the audience) learn are contained within a narrative about U.S. public safety. In other words, according to the logic of this rescue narrative, we learn about the “other” only for instrumental reasons—our own national security.

In all of these ways, *The West Wing* performs some of the fundamental precepts of contemporary Orientalism. As Edward Said argues, in the United States—and in particular after World War II—Orientalism retains the racist histories of othering from the earlier European context but becomes increasingly less philological and more concerned with social-scientific policy and administration that is formulated in federal agencies, think tanks, and universities that want to “know” and thus police the Middle East. In this configuration, the production of knowledge about the Middle East is aimed at the maintenance of U.S. hegemony and national security, and it winds up producing an image of the Arab as “other”—the antithesis of Western humanity and progress.²⁶ Indeed, when Josh details the cultural wasteland of Islamic fundamentalism, he enacts one of the central rhetorical principles of Orientalism, for, as Said argues, the “net effect” of contemporary Orientalism is to erase any American awareness of the Arab world’s culture and human-

ity (its poets, its novelists, its means of self-representation), replacing these with a dehumanizing social-scientific index of “attitudes, trends, statistics.”²⁷

The West Wing's fictional schoolroom performs this kind of social-scientific Orientalism in the name of liberal humanism. And it does so through a pedagogical form of enunciation that places viewers in the position of high school students—and particularly naive ones at that. The program speaks to viewers as if they were children or, at best, the innocent objects of historical events beyond their control. The “why does everyone want to kill us?” mantra espoused by *The West Wing*'s fictional students, becomes, to use Lauren Berlant's phrase, a form of “infantile citizenship”²⁸ that allows adult viewers comfortably to confront the horrors and guilt of war by donning the cloak of childhood innocence (epitomized, of course, by the wide-eyed figure of President Bush himself, who, in his first televised speech to Congress after the attacks, asked, “Why do they hate us?”).

In the days following the attacks, the Bush administration spoke often of the eternal and “essential goodness” of the American people, creating a through-line for the American past that flattered a despairing public by making them the moral victims of a pure outside evil.²⁹ In a similar instance of denial, commentators spoke of “the end of innocence”³⁰ that the attacks ushered in as if America had been completely without knowledge and guilt before this day.³¹ Not surprisingly, in this respect, the histories mobilized by the media after 9/11 were radically selective and simplified versions of the past that produced a kind of moral battlefield for “why we fight.” As Justin Lewis shows in his survey of four leading U.S. newspapers, print journalists writing about 9/11 tended to evoke World War II and Nazi Germany while “other histories were, regardless of relevance, distinctly less prominent.” Lewis claims that “the more significant absences [were] those histories that signify the West's disregard for democracy and human rights [such as] the U.S. government's support for the Saudi Arabian Theocracy.”³² He argues that the history of World War II and Nazi Germany was mobilized because of its compelling narrative dimensions—especially its good versus evil binary. While this creation of heroes and villains was also a primary aspect of television coverage, it seems likely that many viewers weren't really looking for “objective truth” so much as narrative itself. In the face of shock and uncertainty that seemed to make time stand still, these narratives offered people a sense of historical continuity with a shared, and above all moral, past.³³

The need to make American audiences feel that they were in the moral position ran through a number of television's "reality" genres. One of the central ways that this moral position was promoted was through the depiction of women victims. According to Jayne Rodgers, journalists tended to frame news stories in "myths of gender," and, she claims, one of the central trajectories of these myths was a reversal of the gendered nature of heroism and victimization. Rodgers points out that even while "male deaths from the attacks outnumbered female deaths by a ratio of three to one," news narratives typically portrayed men as heroes (firemen, policemen, Giuliani) and women as victims (suffering and often pregnant widows). Despite the fact that there were thirty-three women firefighters and rescue workers on duty on September 11, the media portraits of heroism were mainly of men, which, as Rodgers aptly argues, worked to "restore gender, as well as social and political order."³⁴

On television, these myths of gender were often connected to age-old Western fantasies of the East in which "Oriental" men assault (and even rape) Western women and, more symbolically, the West itself. (Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* [1915] or Valentino in *The Sheik* [1921] demonstrate the longevity of this orientalized "rape" fantasy.) In the case of 9/11, the United States took its figural place as innocent victim in stories that interwove myths of gender and the Orient. Both daytime talk shows and nighttime news were filled with melodramatic tales of women's suffering that depicted women as the moral victims of Islamic extremism. And "women" here meant both the women of Afghanistan and American survivors (the widows) who lost their husbands during the attack. While of course these women are at one level real women who really suffered, on television they were fictionally rendered through melodramatic conventions that tended to elide the complexity of the historical causes of the tragic circumstances the women faced.

For example, in the weeks following the attacks, *Oprah!* ran episodes featuring pregnant survivors who had lost their husbands. These episodes intertwined personal memories (via home videos of the deceased) with therapy sessions featuring the traumatized women. In these episodes, the "talking cure" narrative logic of the talk show format was itself strangely derailed by the magnitude of events; the female guest was so traumatized that she was literally unable to speak. In one episode, for example, a young pregnant woman sits rigidly on stage while popular therapist Dr. Phil tells her about the twelve steps of

trauma (and Oprah interjects with inspirational wisdom). The episode presents this woman as having lost not only her husband but also her voice and, with that, her ability to narrate her own story. In the process the program implicitly asks viewers to identify with this woman as the moral and innocent victim of *chance*. In other words, any causal agent (or any sense that her suffering is actually the result of complex political histories) is reduced to the “twist of fate” narrative fortunes of the daytime soap.

Writing about the history of American melodramas, Linda Williams demonstrates that this theme of the “suffering” moral victim (particularly women and African Americans) can be traced through cinematic and televisual media representations (including depictions of American historical events). Williams claims that victim characters elicit our identification through sentiment (not only with them but also, allegorically, with historical injustices they face). Following Lauren Berlant and Ann Douglas, she cautions that sentiment and vicarious identification with suffering—in both media texts and politics more generally—are often a stand-in for actual social justice, but, importantly, sentiment is not the same as justice. By offering audiences a structure of feeling (the identification with victims, their revealed goodness, and their pain), melodrama compensates for tragic injustices and human sacrifice. Or, as Williams puts it, “melodramatic climaxes that end in the death of a good person—Uncle Tom, Princess Charlotte, Jack Dawson (in *Titanic*) offer paroxysms of pathos and recognitions of virtue compensating for the loss of life.”³⁵ In political melodramas (like the stories told of 9/11’s female victims), pathos can often be an end in itself; the spectator emerges feeling a sense of righteousness even while justice has not been achieved in reality and even while many people feel completely alienated from and overwhelmed by the actual political sphere.

Addressing the public with the same kind of sentimental/compensatory citizenship, President Bush used the image of female suffering in his first televised address before Congress after the attacks. Harking back to Cold War paranoia films like Warner Bros.’ *Red Nightmare* (which was made with the Defense Department and showed what a typical American town would look like if it were taken over by “commies”), President Bush painted a picture of the threat that terrorism posed to our freedom. “In Afghanistan,” he claimed, “we see Al Qaeda’s vision of the world,” after which he listed a string of daily

oppressions people might be forced to face should Al Qaeda's vision prevail. First on his list was the fact that "women are not allowed to go to school." The rhetorical construction here is important because by suggesting that Al Qaeda had a vision for the world, President Bush asked TV audiences literally to imagine themselves taken over by Al Qaeda and in the women's place—the place of suffering. Having thereby stirred up viewers' moral indignation and pathos, he then went on to justify his own plan for aggression, giving the Taliban a series of ultimatums. Whatever one thinks about Bush's speech, it is clear that the image of suffering female victims was a powerful emotional ploy through which he connected his own war plan to a sense of moral righteousness and virtue (and it is also clear that we had never heard him speak of these women in Afghanistan before that day).

A more complicated example is CNN's airing of the documentary *Beneath the Veil*, which depicts the abuses that women of Afghanistan suffered under the Taliban. Originally made in the spring of 2001 for Britain's Channel 4, *Beneath the Veil* was produced "undercover" by Saira Shah (who grew up in Britain but whose father is from Afghanistan) and with considerable risk to the filmmaker (photography was outlawed by the Taliban, and the fact that Shah is a woman made the whole process doubly dangerous). *Beneath the Veil* outlines not only the Taliban's oppression and cruelty but also the history of global neglect of Afghan women, as well as the need for political action now. Shah is careful to reflect on her own Western assumptions about women, feminism, and Islam, and she shows that it is the Afghan women themselves—a group known as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)—who were the first to fight against the Taliban.

Beneath the Veil opens with footage shot (via hidden cameras) by RAWA. There are images of women huddled in a pickup truck and being brought to a football field turned public execution arena. They are killed for alleged adultery. Interspersed throughout the film are images of and dialogues about the women's oppression, RAWA's own efforts to liberate women, and Shah's documentary witnessing of the events. An accompanying Web site (still up) provides numerous links to information and zones of action and participation. The program and its Web site constitute an important political use of electronic media. While there are images of female suffering, the pathos elicited by the pictures is organized around the desire for action (which Williams

reminds us can also be part of melodrama) rather than just sentiment as an end in itself.

When *Beneath the Veil* was rerun and repurposed by CNN in the context of the post-9/11 news coverage, however, its politics were significantly altered. In the two months following the attacks, CNN reran *Beneath the Veil* so many times that it became a kind of daily documentary ritual. Although it was certainly important for audiences to learn about this human rights disaster, we should nevertheless wonder why Western eyes were willing to look at this documentary with such fascination after 9/11 (as opposed to, say, on September 10). First, it should be noted that in the wake of 9/11 documentaries of all sorts (but especially ones about terrorism) were, according to *Variety*, a “hot property” in the television industry.³⁶ Second, whatever the original achievements of the program, in this new context audiences were led to make easy equivocations between the kind of oppression the women of Afghanistan faced and the loss of innocent life on American soil on September 11. In the context of CNN’s programming flow, we saw *Beneath the Veil* adjacent to news footage depicting Ground Zero, stories of American victims and heroes, anthrax attacks, public safety warnings, mug shots of the FBI’s most-wanted terrorists, and war footage depicting a bizarre mix of bombs and humanitarian aid being dropped on Afghanistan.³⁷ In this programming context, *Beneath the Veil* could easily be read as a cautionary tale (like *Red Nightmare*) and a justification for the U.S. bombings in Afghanistan. In other words, it might well have conjured up national unity for war as a moral position.

In the midst of the U.S. bombings, Shah produced a follow-up film, *The Unholy War*, which aired on CNN in mid-November 2001. This film documented the lives of women (especially three young Afghan girls) in the midst of the U.S. war against the Taliban. The film showed the destruction caused by bombings, the problems entailed in building a post-Taliban regime, and Shah’s own failures in trying to help the three girls (she attempts to get them an education), whose father rejected her humanitarian efforts. *The Unholy War* disrupted the “flow” of CNN’s rotation of *Beneath the Veil*. It also punctured President Bush’s melodramatic rescue/war narrative and questioned (the usually unquestionable) ideologies of “humanitarianism” that legitimated the U.S. bombings. As Shah said in an interview with *Salon*: “I couldn’t believe that we couldn’t help them and that money wouldn’t solve their

problems. . . . That was a real revelation for me. I rather arrogantly, in a very Western way, assumed that I could solve their problems because I had good will and money. It taught me that their problems are more complex. It also taught me a lot about what's needed in Afghanistan, and how frustrating it is rebuilding a country that's been destroyed to the extent that Afghanistan has."³⁸

Event TV and Celebrity Citizenship

While Shah's *Unholy War* suggests that there were indeed counterhistories and antiwar messages to be found on the airwaves and on Web sites like Salon.com, the news images of unfathomable destruction that aired on 9/11 resulted in industry attempts to match that spectacle with reparative images on a scale as great as the falling towers. In this respect, "event TV" (or television programs designed to take on the status and audience shares of media events) flourished after 9/11, allowing for another staging of national unity after the attacks. These staged events created a "meta-universe" of Hollywood stars enacting the role of patriotic publics.

The first of these events was the celebrity telethon *America: A Tribute to Heroes*. Telecast live from New York, Los Angeles, and London on September 21, 2001, at 9:00 p.m., the two-hour program was simulcast on more than 320 national broadcast and cable networks. According to the Nielsen ratings, the telethon garnered a 65 share of U.S. households, making it one of the most-watched programs of the year, behind only the Super Bowl.³⁹

America: A Tribute to Heroes featured an overwhelming community of stars recounting the stories of those who died or risked their lives in the struggle. These eulogies were interspersed with musical performances of popular hits from the baby-boom to post-boomer past (the assumed generations of donors). Like all televised funerals, this one deployed television's aesthetics of liveness to stave off the fear of death. In other words, not only the "live" feed but also the sense of unrehearsed spontaneity and intimate revelations gave viewers a way to feel that life goes on in the present. The ritualistic and funereal atmosphere resurrected the recently dead for the living, restoring faith not only in spiritual terms but also in terms of the medium itself (in other words, it was that most "degraded" of media—television—that brought us this powerful sense of healing and community).⁴⁰

While certainly designed to be a global media event, this was a deliberately understated spectacle, achieved through a deliberate display of “star capital” minus the visual glitz and ego. Staged with “zero degree” style (just candles burning on an otherwise unadorned set), the program appealed to a desire to see Hollywood stars, singers, and sports heroes reduced to “real” people, unadorned, unrehearsed (or at least underrehearsed), and literally unnamed and unannounced (there was no variety host presiding over the entertainment, no identification of the stars, and no studio audience). This absence of style signified the authenticity of the staged event, thereby giving stars the authority to speak for the dead. So too, the actual mix of stars (for example, Muhammad Ali, Clint Eastwood, Paul Simon, Julia Roberts, Enrique Iglesias, Bruce Springsteen, Celine Dion, Chris Rock, Sylvester Stallone) combined what might otherwise have been a battle-of-star semiotics (given their often at-odds personas and historical associations) into a compelling and, for many people, moving site of mourning. The program’s “interactive” aspect further strengthened the telethon’s aura of community, as on-demand celebrity phone operators, from Goldie Hawn to Jack Nicholson, promised to reach out and touch us. In all of these ways, *America: A Tribute to Heroes* is a stunning example of how post-9/11 television has created not a public sphere per se, but rather a self-referential Hollywood public sphere of celebrities who stand in for real citizens and who somehow make us feel connected to a wider social fabric (figs. 3, 4).

The Fifty-third Annual Emmy Awards ceremony, which was twice delayed because of the attacks, is another example. Jack Valenti’s “show must go on” ethos was everywhere in the publicity leading up to and culminating in this yearly television event. Somehow the industry was convinced that the airing of the Emmys was so important to America that any sign of celebrity resistance to gather (whether for fear of being attacked or for fear of looking crassly self-absorbed) would somehow be tantamount to “letting the terrorists win.” As Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Chairman Bryce Zabel told viewers, canceling the Emmys “would have been an admission of defeat. Like baseball and Broadway, we are an American tradition.”⁴¹

It seems just as probable, however, that the Academy and CBS were also worrying about their own commercial viability in the post-9/11 climate. In other words, canceling the Emmys would not just be an admission of the defeat of the nation; it would also be an admission that



Figure 3. Willie Nelson leads a celebrity sing-along on *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, September 21, 2001.



Figure 4. The celebrity anthem on *America: A Tribute to Heroes*, September 21, 2001.

the consumer logics of TV—its annual ceremonies and self-congratulations—had been defeated. In the wake of 9/11, the Emmys came to signify the degree to which the televisual and marketing scene could be revitalized. The broadcast, which took place on November 4 at Los Angeles’s Shubert Theatre (almost two months after the originally scheduled broadcast), was carefully orchestrated in this regard. Although there were more “no-shows” than usual, and while the area outside the theater was reportedly a “surreal” scene of rooftop sharpshooters, the Emmy producers encouraged the stars to perform their roles in the usual fashion. Before the broadcast, Executive Producer Gary Smith coached the stars: “Don’t be afraid to be excited. . . . That’s what people are looking for.”⁴²

The Emmy Awards program was another self-referential celebrity public sphere, this time constructed through appeals to television and Hollywood history. The opening sequence begins with Christian trumpet player/singer Phil Driscoll doing a bluesy rendition of “America the Beautiful” with a backup choir of students from different colleges across the country. The national unity theme is underscored by a large screen display of video images (everything from images of the flag and the Statue of Liberty to historical footage of Charles Lindbergh’s lift-off and civil rights protests to landscape images of prairies and cities, all spliced together in a seamless quilt of meaning). This is followed by a female voiceover that announces: “Tonight television speaks to a global audience as we show the world images of an annual celebration. Our presence here tonight does more than honor an industry, it honors those cherished freedoms that set us apart as a nation and a people.”

After this, the scene cuts to veteran newscaster Walter Cronkite, who appears via satellite from Toronto. Cronkite directly addresses the camera and narrates a history of television's importance to American politics and culture. Evoking the words of the World War II broadcaster Edward R. Murrow, Cronkite says, "Television, the great common denominator, has lifted our common vision as never before, and television also reminds us that entertainment can help us heal."

The Driscoll performance, the video backdrop, the female voiceover, and finally the widely respected Cronkite provide a prelude to what will be the night's apologetic theme: the ritualistic honoring of stars is not narcissistic, commercialized self-indulgence, but instead a public service to America and its image in the world.⁴³ The opening sequence then transitions to host Ellen DeGeneres, who delivers her monologue as the cameras cut back and forth to a bevy of Hollywood stars seated in the audience. Significantly, among those singled out are stars associated with Hollywood liberalism, including the cast of *The West Wing* and Bill Maher (who had already been in trouble with his sponsors for what they perceived to be unpatriotic comments). In other words, like the telethon, the Emmy ceremony was not simply "right-wing" in its approach to patriotism; it presented well-known Hollywood liberals (including a grand finale by Barbra Streisand and, of course, DeGeneres herself) as part of a national community who leave their identity politics home to join together and defend the larger American cause. Drawing attention to the patriotic mission of this liberal constituency, DeGeneres humorously asks the audience, "What would bug the Taliban more than seeing a gay woman in a suit surrounded by Jews?"

While the opening act establishes television as its own historical reference and television stars as their own public, a sequence near the end of the broadcast is even more blatant in its self-referential memories of Hollywood nationalism and celebrity citizenship. And while the first act uses network-era "hard" newsman Cronkite (who is in Toronto and far removed from the pomp and pageantry), this later segment features the ultimate postnetwork celebrity journalist, Larry King (who is dressed in a tuxedo and obviously part of the Hollywood community). King introduces a montage of vintage footage portraying Hollywood's efforts in wartime (e.g., the Andrews Sisters; Betty Grable's legs; Bugs Bunny; Bob Hope and the USO; Marilyn Monroe posing for the boys and kissing a wounded GI; Frank Sinatra signing an

autograph; Harpo Marx clowning on stage; Bob Hope and a bevy of sexy starlets in Vietnam; Bob Hope, Steve Martin, and Jay Leno in the Gulf interspersed with Vietnam footage of Hope and Phyllis Diller as well as black-and-white images of Nat King Cole and Milton Berle performing for the troops). The rapid, decontextualized series of star fetish icons and the musical accompaniment (from the Andrews Sisters' World War II hit "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," to a standard rock riff, to Lee Greenwood singing "I'm Proud to Be an American") establish a "commonsense" and highly sentimental history of Hollywood patriotism (or as Larry King put it while introducing the montage, "Over the years the beat of the music changes, but the heart beneath it never wavers"). This nostalgic display of stars, with its thesis of unchanging Hollywood sentiment, obscures the different historical contexts in which World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War were fought (and obviously also the very different levels of popular support these wars had).

The montage sequence ends with an overhead traveling shot picturing a vast audience of GIs applauding Bob Hope during the Gulf War. The sequence then dissolves back to an overhead traveling shot of the celebrity audience applauding in the Shubert Theatre. This dissolve from the GIs to the Emmy audience—and the fact that the shots are perfectly matched—establishes a visual rhetoric that asks viewers to imagine that soldiers and celebrities are contiguous publics, and perhaps even comparable public servants. Immediately after the dissolve, the show cuts back to Larry King (live) on stage, where he speaks into the camera: "Once again we're in a time when America's armed forces are being sent to defend our freedom, and once again the entertainment industry is giving what it can." The entire segment legitimates future wars through a sentimental journey through Hollywood's wartime past.

The segment is capped off by yet another invocation of Hollywood's self-referential public sphere. Larry King speaks directly into the camera but not, as is usually the case, in order to address the home audience. Instead, he addresses an ailing Bob Hope at home: "We know that Bob Hope is watching at home tonight. And you should know, dear Robert, that we are thinking of you. . . . From all of us here, thanks for the memories." King's direct address to Hope—intercut with stars applauding in the studio audience—creates a completely enclosed universe of citizen celebrities, orchestrating a set of complex relays

between popular memories of vintage Hollywood, military history since World War II, and the present-day meanings of nationalism and war. In this televised display of celebrity patriotism, public service and publicity find their ideal meeting ground.

Osama bin Laden Meets the *South Park* Kids

In the introductory pages of his essay “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud discusses the intellectual uncertainty he faced during World War I when he found it impossible to keep up with the flow of international publications.⁴⁴ In the world of electronic “instant” histories, these problems of intellectual uncertainty are compounded in ways that Freud could never have imagined. The “uncanny” seems an especially appropriate trope for the current situation, as nothing seems to be what it was and everything is what it wasn’t just minutes before it happened. In this context, the literate pursuit of history writing seems slow to the point of uselessness. This is, of course, compounded by the fact that the publishing industry is painfully behind the speed of both war and electronic media. So rather than partake of either historical “conclusions” or future “predictions,” I want to open up some questions about television and nationalism vis-à-vis the changing economies of industrially produced culture.

Given the political divisions that have resurfaced since 2001, it seems likely that the grand narratives of national unity that sprang up after 9/11 were for many people more performative than sincere. In other words, it is likely that many viewers really did know that all the newfound patriotism was really just a public performance staged by cameras. Still, after 9/11 many people found it important to “perform” the role of citizen, which included the performance of belief in national myths of unity. And if you didn’t perform this role, then somehow you were a bad American. In this respect, no matter what they thought of the situation, in the wake of 9/11 stars had to perform the role of “love it or leave it” citizen to remain popular (a lesson that Bill Maher learned with a vengeance when his TV show *Politically Incorrect* was canceled).⁴⁵

But did the performance really work? Just days after the attacks, the limits of performative nationalism were revealed in the televised celebrity telethon *America: A Tribute to Heroes* when, in the final sequence, everyone gathered ‘round Willie Nelson to sing “America the

Beautiful.” Now, this was certainly a bad performance. Most of the celebrities were either too embarrassed to sing, or else they just didn’t know the words to this show tune turned national anthem.⁴⁶ Some stars were visibly squinting at teleprompters with consternation, hoping to sing a verse. Yet, because the telethon was foremost aimed at baby boom and post-baby boom generations, most audiences would have known the popular ballads that were directly aimed at these niche generations. Clearly pop songs like John Lennon’s “Imagine” (sung by Neil Young), Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song” (sung by Wyclef Jean), or Paul Simon’s “Bridge over Troubled Waters” have more historical meaning to these taste publics than any national anthem does.

More generally, I think the post-9/11 performance of nationalism will fail because it really does not fit with the economic and cultural practices of twenty-first-century U.S. media society. The fact that there is no longer a three-network broadcast system means that citizens are not collected as aggregate audiences for national culture. As we all know, what we watch on TV no longer really is what other people watch—unless they happen to be in our demographic taste culture. The postnetwork system is precisely about fragmentation and narrowcasting. While the new five-hundred-channel cable systems may not provide true diversity in the sense of political or cultural pluralism, the postnetwork system does assume a culture that is deeply divided by taste, not one that is unified through national narratives.⁴⁷ In a multinational consumer culture it becomes difficult for media to do business without addressing the niche politics of style, taste, and especially youth subcultures that have become central to global capitalism. In the end, the new media environment does not lend itself to unifying narratives of patriotism, if only because these older forms of nationalism have nothing to do with the “return to normalcy” and normal levels of consumption. While nationalist popular culture does, of course, exist (and obviously rose in popularity after 9/11), it appears more as another niche market (those people who hang flags on their cars) than as a unifying cultural dominant.⁴⁸

The actual cultural styles in these new narrowcast media markets are increasingly based on irony, parody, skepticism, and “TV-literate” critical reading protocols. For people who grew up watching *The Simpsons*’ hilarious parodies of mass culture and national politics; for people who fell asleep to Dave Letterman or Conan O’Brien; and for viewers who regularly watched *Saturday Night Live*, *In Living Color*,

The Daily Show, and *Mad TV*'s political/news parodies, a sudden return to blind patriotism (and blind consumerism) is probably not really likely.

In the first week after the September 11 attacks, the cable operators and networks all did cover the same story—and for a moment the nation returned to something very much like the old three-network system.⁴⁹ Yet, the case of 9/11 also demonstrates that in the current media landscape it is hard to sustain the fantasy of utopian collectivity that had been so central to previous media events. Comparing media coverage of 9/11 with the coverage of the Kennedy assassination, Fredric Jameson argues that back in 1963 a utopian fantasy of collectivity was in part constructed through news reporters' "clumsiness [and] the technological naiveté in which they sought to rise to the occasion." But, he claims, the media are now so full of orchestrated spectacle and public violence on a daily basis that many people had a hard time seeing media coverage of 9/11 as documents of anything sincere, much less as any kind of intersubjective, utopian communication. As Jameson puts it, despite the many claims that America lost its innocence on 9/11, it was "not America, but rather its media [that had] . . . definitively lost its innocence."⁵⁰

Certainly, for industry executives who work in the competitive environment of narrowcasting, sentiments of national belonging and utopian collectivity quickly gave way to the "bottom line." In fact, even in the "good will" climate of September 2001, the industry was still widely aware of the competitive realities of the postnetwork marketplace. CNN, which then had an exclusive deal with the Al Jazeera network, tried to block other news outlets from broadcasting its satellite transmissions of bin Laden's video address.⁵¹ Even the celebrity telethon was a source of industry dispute. Worried that cable telecasts would undercut audience shares for broadcasters, some network affiliates and network-owned-and-operated stations tried to stop a number of cable channels from simulcasting *America: A Tribute to Heroes*. According to *Variety*, upon hearing of possible cable competition, "some of the vocal managers at the Big Four TV stations . . . went bananas and threatened to cancel the telethon and schedule their own local programming."⁵² So much for humanitarianism in the postnetwork age!

Given this competitive media marketplace, it comes as no surprise that industry insiders quickly revised their initial predictions about the

fate of American popular culture. By October 4, the front page of the *New York Times* proclaimed, "In Little Time Pop Culture Is Back to Normal," stating that the industry was backtracking on its initial predictions that the events of September 11 would completely change culture. David Kissinger, president of the USA Television Production Group, told the *Times* that the industry's initial reaction to the attacks may have been overstated and that because most industry people were "terror stricken" on September 11, "we shouldn't be held accountable for much of what we said that week."⁵³

In fact, within a month, even irony was back in vogue, especially on late-night TV, but increasingly also on entertainment programs. By early November, Comedy Central's *South Park*—a cartoon famous for its irreverence—ran an episode in which the *South Park* kids visit Afghanistan. Once there, Cartman (*South Park*'s leading bad boy) meets bin Laden, and the two engage in an extended homage to Warner Bros. cartoons. Bin Laden takes the roles of the wacky Daffy Duck, the dull-headed Elmer Fudd, and even the lovesick Pepe La Pew (he is shown romancing a camel much as Pepe romances a cat that he thinks is a skunk). Meanwhile, Cartman plays the ever-obnoxious Bugs Bunny (like Bugs, he even does a drag performance as a harem girl wooing a lovesick bin Laden, whose eyes, in classic Tex Avery cartoon style, pop out of his head) (figs. 5, 6).

Although the episode was the usual "libertarian" hodgepodge of mixed political messages (some seemingly critical of U.S. air strikes, others entirely Orientalist), its blank ironic sensibility did at least provide for some unexpected TV moments. In one scene, when the *South Park* kids meet Afghan children in a war-torn village, American claims of childish innocence (promoted, for example, in *The West Wing*'s fictional classroom) are opened up for comic interrogation. Dodging a U.S. bomb attack, the Afghan children tell the *South Park* kids, "Over a third of the world hates America." "But why?" ask the *South Park* kids, "Why does a third of the world hate us?" And the Afghan kids reply, "Because you don't realize that a third of the world hates you." While the episode ends with an over-the-top cartoon killing of bin Laden and an American flag waving to the tune of "America the Beautiful," the program establishes such a high degree of pastiche, blank irony, and recombinant imagery that it would be difficult to say that it encourages any particular "dominant" reading of the war. The laughter seems directed more at semiotic breakdowns, perhaps mimick-



Figure 5. *South Park*, “Osama Bin Laden Has Farty Pants,” November 7, 2001.



Figure 6. Osama “La Pew,” lovesick for a camel, *South Park*, November 7, 2001.

ing the way in which news coverage of the war seems to make people increasingly incapable of knowing what’s going on—a point that one of the *South Park* characters underscores at the end of the show, when he says, “I’m confused.”

To be sure, programs like *South Park* and the niche cable channels on which they appear might not translate into the old enlightenment dream of “public service” TV with a moral imperative for its national public. Television studies is, of course, riddled with debates over the question of whether these new forms of narrowcasting and multichannel media outlets will destroy what some critics call common culture. In response to the increasing commercialization and fragmentation of European electronic media, scholars like Jostein Gripsrud, Graham Murdock, and James Curran champion European public service broadcast models, and even while they do not advocate a simplistic return to paternalistic models of “cultivation” and taste, they seek a way to reformulate the ideal of an electronic democratic culture.⁵⁴ In the United States the situation is somewhat different. The “public interest” policy rhetoric on which the national broadcast system was founded has been woefully underachieved; broadcasters did not engage a democratic culture of diverse interests, but rather for the most part catered to the cultural tastes of their target consumers (which for many years meant white middle-class audiences). Moreover, the networks often interpreted public service requirements within the context of public relations and the strengthening of their own oligopoly power.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the underfunded Public Broadcasting System grew increasingly dependent

on corporate funding. And, as Laurie Ouellette argues, by relying on paternalistic notions of “cultivation” and catering to narrow-minded taste hierarchies, the network has alienated audiences.⁵⁶

Still, I am not saying that the new multichannel and multiplatform system of niche culture is necessarily better. Instead, we need to ask exactly what the new fragmented niche networks, as well as the proliferation of Internet sites, provide. What do the new forms of multinational media outlets offer beyond the proliferation of products and styles? The question is even more complex when we consider the fact that cable and broadcast networks, Internet sites, search engines, television producers/distributors, movie studios, radio stations, newspapers, and publishing companies are increasingly part of global conglomerate media structures (Disney, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp., Viacom, Time-Warner, etc.).⁵⁷ In the media industries, as in other postindustrial modes of capitalism, there is both fragmentation and centralization at the same time. Any attempt to consider the political effects of the multiplication of channels (and fragmentation of audiences) still has to be considered within the overall patterns of consolidation at the level of ownership.⁵⁸

Perhaps I am a bit overly optimistic, but I do want to end by suggesting some alternative possibilities within the highly consolidated, yet also fragmented, global mediasphere. As Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz argue, although media events may be hegemonically sponsored and often function to restore consensual values, they always also “invite reexamination of the status quo.” Following Victor Turner, Dayan and Katz claim that media events put audiences in a “liminal” context, outside the norms of the everyday. Even if media events do not institutionalize new norms, they do “provoke . . . mental appraisal of alternative possibilities.”⁵⁹ In this sense, although I have focused primarily on media myths of reunification and nationalism, it is also true that 9/11 provoked counternarratives and political dialogues. In particular, 9/11 made people aware of new prospects for communication in a rapidly changing media environment.

Certainly, the Internet allowed for a collective interrogation of mainstream media and discussions among various marginalized groups. According to Bruce A. Williams, while “mainstream media reiterated themes of national unity, the chat rooms allowed different groups of Americans to debate what the impact of the attacks was for them specifically.”⁶⁰ Internet sites like Salon.com—as well as access to a host

of international news outlets—provided alternative views and global discussions. Convergence platforms opened up venues for expression. For example, after 9/11 a chat room hosted by the Black Entertainment Television network included conversations about whether it was possible to reconcile black beliefs about racist police and fire departments with the heroic images of police and firefighters after 9/11. Resistance groups from around the globe used the Internet as a forum for antiwar e-mails, virtual marches, and group organizing. The Social Science Research Council's Web site allowed scholars to weigh in on the events at Internet speed. The "low-tech" medium of radio (especially National Public Radio) likewise provided alternative voices.

That said, my point here is not that "new" media or "alternative media" are categorically "better" than TV. Certainly, many Internet sites and talk radio stations were filled with right-wing war fever. As Williams suggests, because the Internet allows for insular conversations, some message boards (such as "Crosstar") discussed ways to draw clear ideological boundaries and to keep "dissenting voices" (i.e., liberals) off the board.⁶¹ In this respect, we should not embrace the Internet in some essentialist sense as a pure space of pluralism which is always already more democratic than "old" media. Instead, it seems more accurate to say that the presence of multiple media platforms holds out hopeful possibilities for increased expression, but what this will amount to in terms of democracy and citizenship remains a complex historical question.

In addition to the Internet, the presence of the Al Jazeera news network had a destabilizing effect on the status of information itself. Al Jazeera officials defy the democratic legacy of the "free press" that had been so crucial to U.S. Cold War politics. Whereas the United States used to claim that its so-called free press was a reigning example of "free world" democracy, Al Jazeera now has taken up the same public pose, claiming that it will present all sides of the story from a Middle Eastern vantage point. In their book on Al Jazeera, Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar discuss how the network's post-9/11 coverage—especially its graphic coverage of the U.S. bombings in Afghanistan and the circulation of bin Laden's videotapes—quickly became a public relations crisis for the Bush administration.⁶² Troubled by the bad PR, the Bush administration formed a Hollywood summit to discuss the role the industry might play in the war on terrorism. The military also met with Hollywood talent at the University of Southern

California's Institute for Creative Technologies, a military/Hollywood alliance that Jonathan Burston aptly terms "militainment."⁶³ By late November 2001 President Bush had signed an initiative to start the Middle East Radio network (which strives to counterbalance anti-Americanism in the Arab world and is aimed especially at youth audiences).⁶⁴ As such federally sponsored efforts suggest, the proliferation of news outlets, entertainment networks, and Internet sites, as well as the mounting synergy between Hollywood and the military, has changed the nature of semiotic warfare, and the United States is certainly keen to play by the new rules of the game.⁶⁵

Back to Normal?

On the one hand, as I have suggested, much of the TV landscape looks like a continuation of the same kinds of programs that aired prior to 9/11, and for this reason it is tempting to say that television's "return to normal" transcended the events of 9/11 and that everything is as it was before. On the other hand, 9/11 haunts U.S. commercial television.⁶⁶ The memory of 9/11 now—in 2004—circulates in ways that disrupt the kind of historical narratives and nationalist logic that had been so central to the initial return to the normal TV schedule.

Since 2001 the history and memory of 9/11 have in fact become a national battleground—not only in the notorious fights over Ground Zero's reconstruction but also in the electronic spaces of television. By March of 2002 major networks had begun to feature commemorative documentaries that told the story of 9/11.⁶⁷ By March of 2004 President Bush launched a presidential campaign with TV ads that show historical footage of the firefighters, implicitly equating their heroism with his presidency. But whereas nationalist historical pedagogy initially served to solidify consent for the Bush administration, now the history and memory of 9/11 are not so simply marshaled. On March 5, 2004, just one day after the ads began to circulate, CNN interviewed a woman who had lost her husband on 9/11. Unlike the speechless pregnant widows on *Oprah!* back in 2001, this woman had regained her voice and spoke quite articulately of her disgust for the President's use of 9/11 footage for political ends.

In the end, I suspect that the current situation is ripe for new visions of apocalyptic techno-futures, with satellites, guided missiles, surveillance cameras, and communication media of all kinds at the core of an

ongoing genre of techno-warfare criticism waged by Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and many others.⁶⁸ But it seems to me that, as forceful and perceptive as this kind of work has been, this is really just the easy way out. Instead of engaging in yet another stream of doom-and-gloom technological disaster criticism, it seems more useful to think about how cultural studies and media studies in particular might hold on to a politics of hope. What I have in mind is in no way the same as utopian claims to transcendence and unity (whether local, national, or global) through new media technologies. Rather, this politics of hope is situated in a confrontation with the actually existing historical divisions around us. This materialist politics of hope should embrace the new global media environment as an opportunity to listen to “the third of the world that hates us” rather than (to use Bush’s formulation) clutter the globe with messages about “how good we are.” The world has heard enough about America. Time now to tune in elsewhere.

NOTES

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1. “Disaster Programming,” *Variety.com*, September 21, 2001, 1. For more on TV network cancellations of violent movies, see John Dempsey, “Cable Nets Nix Violent Pix in Wake of Tragedy,” *Variety.com*, September 16, 2001, 1–2; Joe Flint and John Lippman, “Hollywood Revisits Terrorism-Related Projects” *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2001, B2; Joe Flint, “TV Programmers Avoid All Allusions to Attacks,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 28, 2001, B6.

2. For speculations on the “end of irony” see Jeff Gordinier, “How We Saw It,” *Entertainment Weekly*, September 28, 2001, 12; Peter Bart, “Where’s the Snap and Crackle of Pop Culture?” *Variety.com*, September 30, 2001, 1–2. Note, however, that a counterdiscourse popped up immediately in venues like the *Onion* and *Salon*, which used irony early on. In an online essay, James Der Derian noted some of the inconsistencies in what he called the “protected zones of language” after 9/11, pointing out, for example, that irony was in some venues under attack: “President Bush was given room to joke in a morale-boosting visit to the CIA, saying he’s ‘spending a lot of quality time lately’ with George Tenet, the director of the CIA.” Der Derian also took on *New York Times* reporter Edward Rothstein for taking an “opportunist shot at postmodernists and postcolonialists” by “claiming that their irony and relativism is ‘ethnically perverse’ and produces ‘guilty passivity.’” See Der Derian’s “9.11: Before, After, and In Between,” Social Science Research Council, After September 11 Archive, SSRN.org, 5 (the original posting date is no longer on the site).

3. Jennifer Netherby, “Renters Flock to Video Stores,” *Videobusiness.com*, September 21, 2001, 1–2. *Video On Line* reported that “Wal-mart stores asked the studios for

a list of their titles that contain scenes of the World Trade Center, presumably to take some merchandising action on those movies" (*VideoBusiness.com/news*, September 13, 2001, 1).

4. "Domain Names Grow after Attacks," *Variety.com*, September 25, 2001, 1.

5. Even while cable outlets are not regulated by the Federal Communications Commission to the extent that the broadcast networks are, they still are widely perceived as "service" industries and protectors of public safety in times of crisis (obviously, this is the platform of cable news outlets like CNN, which dramatically increased its viewership after 9/11).

6. I am borrowing Raymond Williams's phrase "a whole way of life," which he used to define culture. See his *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958; New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 325.

7. More generally, 9/11 disrupted the familiar/consumer uses of a host of communication technologies, from cell phones to television to satellites to video games, all of which now resonated in an uncanny sense with the militaristic/wartime uses for which their basic technology was developed.

8. Mary Anne Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 222–39.

9. Venessa O'Connell, "TV Networks Cut \$320 Million of Ads in Crisis," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2001.

10. *Variety* reported that "commercial breaks were back across the board Monday [September 17]" (Rick Kissell, "TV Getting Back to Biz and Blurbs," *Variety.com*, September 17, 2001, 1).

11. Jack Valenti, "Hollywood, and Our Nation, Will Meet the Test," *Variety.com*, September 27, 2001, 1–2.

12. The President said this in a televised address he delivered at Chicago O'Hare Airport with the aim of convincing people to return to plane travel. Note, too, that in subsequent months various advertisers linked their promotional discourses to 9/11 and the idea of patriotic consumption. (For example, ads for United and American Airlines as well as financial corporations did this.)

13. For examples of literature on TV news, 9/11, and Afghanistan, see *Television and New Media* 3 (May 2002); Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman, eds., *War and the Media* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2003); Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb, eds., *The Media and the War on Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2003); Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism after September 11* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

14. As other scholars have argued, we should not accept at face value the information/entertainment binary that underpins the ideological logic of mainstream media systems. This binary—and the related binaries of important/trivial, private/public, masculine/feminine, and high/low—not only elide the fact that news is also narrative (and increasingly entertaining) but also fail to acknowledge that entertainment also serves to provide audiences with particular ways of knowing about and seeing the world. See, for example, Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 1992); John Fiske, "Popular News," in *Reading Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwyn and Hyman, 1989); James Freedman, ed., *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

15. Der Derian, "9.11," 2.

16. For an interesting discussion of media references to Pearl Harbor and the re-release of the film after 9/11, see Cynthia Weber, "The Media, the 'War on Terrorism'

and the Circulation of Non-Knowledge,” in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 190–99.

17. This kind of coverage is, of course, symptomatic of the general rise of “infotainment” in the climate of media conglomeration and a ratings-driven commercial ethos. For speculation on the social/political effects of the news coverage of 9/11 in terms of “infotainment,” see Daya Kishan Thussu, “Live TV and Bloodless Deaths: War, Infotainment, and 24/7 News,” in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 117–32. There is much additional literature on issues of infotainment. See, for example, Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, *The News about the News: American Journalism in Peril* (New York: Knopf, 2002); and Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (New York: New Press, 1998). For analysis of the effect that round-the-clock coverage of “real time” wars has on foreign policy, see Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy, and Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

18. Claude Brodesser, “Feds Seek H’wood Help,” *Variety.com*, October 7, 2001; Michael Schneider, “Fox Salutes Request by Bush for ‘Wanted’ Spec,” *Variety.com*, October 10, 2001.

19. Michel de Certeau, “History: Science and Fiction,” in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 199–221.

20. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London: Cape, 1972); Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For more on the role of memory/nostalgia in film, television, and other popular media, see, for example, the Cahiers du Cinéma interview with Michel Foucault, reprinted in *Edinburgh Magazine 2* (1977): 19–25; Patrick Bommès and Richard Wright, “Charms of Residence,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1982); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (New York: Belknap Press, 1996); Robert Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); “Special Debate,” *Screen 42* (Summer 2001): 188–216 (this is a series of short essays on trauma and cinema); David Morley and Kevin Robins, “No Place Like Heimat: Images of Homeland,” in *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 85–104; Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

21. Louis Chunovic, “Will TV News—or Its Audience—Finally Grow Up?” *TelevisionWeek*, September 24, 2001, 15. Note that news executives responded to such criticism. For example, CBS’s Mel Karmizan and Fox News Channel’s Roger Ailes promised to upgrade news programs and to cover more international issues.

22. So, too, this ABC lineup followed the logic of what Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz see as integral to media events more generally, namely, a “neo romantic desire for heroic action by great men followed by the spontaneity of mass action” (*Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992], 21).

23. Some people have told me that they found it a useful source of “modeling” for their own conversations with their children.

24. Several other series also created special episodes about the attacks or else planted references to 9/11 in preexisting episodes. NBC's *Third Watch* began its season on October 29 with a documentary in which real-life emergency workers recalled their experiences on 9/11. ABC's *N.Y.P.D. Blue* added two scenes acknowledging the attack into its season opener on November 6. As *New York Times* critic Caryn James pointed out, "The creators of 'Third Watch' and 'N.Y.P.D. Blue' have said they felt a responsibility to deal with the events, but the decision was practical, too. Their supposedly realistic characters would have seemed utterly unbelievable if they had ignored such an all-consuming tragedy" ("Dramatic Events That Rewrite the Script," *New York Times*, October 29, 2001 pg. E7).

25. Josh lists many of the same Taliban injustices that President Bush listed in his first televised speech to Congress after the attacks.

26. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), esp. 284–328.

27. *Ibid.*, 291.

28. Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

29. As Slavoj Žižek wrote just days after the attacks, this sense of a pure "evil Outside" was the response of a public living in a fake "Matrix"-like existence, a public that had for so long considered itself immune to the suffering endured on a daily basis by other world populations and, in any case, in no way responsible for its own perpetuation of violence around the world. Slavoj Žižek, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" posted on Re: Constructions.mit.edu, September 24, 2001. The title is taken from a line in the film *The Matrix*. Žižek's short essay was later developed in a book. See his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002). Der Derian's "9.11," 4–5, similarly evokes *The Matrix*.

30. Jack Lule, "Myth and Terror on the Editorial Page: The *New York Times* Responds to September 11, 2001," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2002): 275–93.

31. Yet, as Marita Sturken argues, this "end of innocence" theme is common to the stories spun around national disasters (for example, the same language was used after JFK's assassination). See Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, chap. 1.

32. Justin Lewis, "Speaking of Wars . . ." *Television and New Media* 3 (May 2002): 170.

33. In this sense, it is interesting to note how television created a *continuous past*, particularly with regard to World War II and Vietnam. In place of the grave generational divides these wars had previously come to signify, television presented unifying narratives that bridged the gap between the self-sacrificing "Greatest Generation" and baby-boomer draft dodgers. This was most vividly displayed when Vietnam POW/Senator John McCain met 1960s youth rebel Stephen Stills on the *Tonight Show*, reconciling their differences.

34. Jayne Rodgers, "Icons and Invisibility: Gender, Myth, and 9/11," in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 206, 207.

35. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White: From Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 24.

36. One month after the attacks, *Variety* reported, "A rash of documentaries—some put together in a hurry—that aim to explain terrorism is a hot property" (Andrea R. Vaucher, "Arab, Terror Docus Heat Up the Market," *Variety.com*, October 10, 2001, 1).

37. U.S. and British air strikes on Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001, and American warplanes attacked the Taliban in the field on October 10, 2001.

38. Saira Shah, cited in Janelle Brown, "Beneath the Veil' Redux," *Salon.com*, November 16, 2001, 1–2.

39. Rick Kissell, "Bush Speech, Telethon Both Draw Record Auds," *Variety.com*, September 23, 2001, 1–2.

40. As one of the readers for this article suggested, the telethon's aura of liveness might have also helped to stave off the fear that TV and commercial culture were themselves "dead." To be sure, live "call-in" donations to stars ensured that money was still circulating through the media wires (here, not through the crass commercialism of TV as usual, but through the exchange economies of charity).

41. He said this on the broadcast.

42. Gary Smith, cited in Joseph Adalian, "Show Finally Goes On and TV Biz Takes Heart," *Variety.com*, November 4, 2001, 1.

43. Underscoring the show's global impact, later in the ceremony there is a video montage of leaders from around the globe offering their condolences to the American public.

44. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Studies in Parapsychology* (1919; New York: Collier Books, 1963), 19–60. Freud discusses his lack of bibliographical references vis-à-vis the war in Europe on page 20.

45. When I delivered this paper at a conference at the University of California, Berkeley, Ratiba Hadj-Moussa pointed out that this dynamic of national performance doesn't necessarily suggest that people don't in some way believe in the performance. I want to thank her for this observation. Clearly, through the act of national performance, it is possible to actually to believe in the role you are playing—and even to believe in it more than ever!

46. Note, too, that "America the Beautiful" replaced the actual national anthem after 9/11 because no one seemed to be able to remember the words to the "Star-Spangled Banner."

47. Even news is now a matter of taste and "branded" by networks in ways that appeal to consumer profiles. For example, the news on Fox (especially its markedly conservative talk shows) attracts one of cable TV's most loyal publics, but many on the left mock its pretense of "Fair and Balanced" reporting. Al Franken's best-seller *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 2003) and his lawsuit with Fox obviously drew on the more left-associated taste publics that define themselves in distinction—in Bourdieu's sense—not only to Fox News but also to the viewers who (they imagine) watch it. For his discussion of taste as social distinction, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

48. Even before the attacks, patriotic symbols were re-emerging as a fashion fad. Corporations such as Tommy Hilfiger, Polo Ralph Lauren, and the Gap Inc.'s Old Navy sported the flag trend, while European haute couture designer Catherine Malandrino unveiled her flag-motif fall collection in the summer of 2001 (which included a skirt that Madonna wore on her concert tour). See Teri Agins, "Flag Fashion's Surging Popularity Fits with Some Fall Collections," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2001, B5. According to Agins, the post-9/11 flag fashions were an extension of this trend, not an invention of it.

49. In 1992 Dayan and Katz speculated on the fate of television, nationalism, and media events in what they saw to be an increasingly multichannel and segmented television system. They argued that while the old three-network or public broadcast systems "will disappear," television's previous functions of "national integration may devolve upon" media events. Their speculation now seems particularly apt. They also predicted that with new technologies and possible erosion of the nation state, "media events may then create and integrate communities larger than nations." See Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 23.

50. Fredric Jameson, "The Dialectics of Disaster," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101 (Spring 2002): 300.

51. According to *Variety*, news organizations were "furious that CNN wouldn't forego competition" and "rallied against exclusives, saying that they don't serve the public's interest during a time of national crisis." ABC news spokesperson Jeffrey Schneider disputed any exclusivity deal by arguing fair use. He said, "There was no question in anybody's mind that these images from Al Jazeera were of compelling national interest," and "We felt we had a duty to broadcast them to the American people which far outweighed whatever commercial agenda CNN was attempting to pursue in this time of war." Meanwhile, Walter Isaacson, CEO of CNN News Group, told *Variety* that CNN had a "reciprocal affiliate deal" with Al Jazeera and that "it's Al Jazeera's material and we don't have a right to give it away." Isaacson did admit, however, that "in a time of war, we won't make a big deal about this sort of thing." See Paul Bernstein and Pamela McClintock, "Newsies Fight over Bin Laden Interview," *Variety.com*, October 7, 2001, 1–2.

52. John Dempsey, "Invite to Cablers to Join Telethon Irks Affils," *Variety.com*, September 20, 2001, 1. The underlying reasons for the broadcasters' concern had to do with issues of East Coast–West Coast transmission times. The big four networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—aired the telethon at 9 p.m. eastern time, and because they wanted to make it seem like a simultaneous nationwide event, they also showed it taped via a dual feed at 9 p.m. on the West Coast. Some single-feed cable networks such as TBS and the National Geographic Channel, however, planned to show the telethon live at 6 p.m. on the West Coast, and thereby preempt the 9 p.m. taped West Coast network broadcast. Some network affiliates and owned and operated stations were simply unhappy that any cable networks were airing the telethon, even if cablers showed it simultaneously (at 9 p.m.) with the Big Four.

53. David Kessinger, cited in Rick Lyman with Bill Carter, "In Little Time Pop Culture Is Almost Back to Normal," *New York Times*, October 4, 2001.

54. See, for example, Jostein Gripsrud, ed., *Television and Common Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1999), esp. Graham Murdock, "Rights and Representations," 7–17; James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy Revisited," in *Mass Media and Society*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 1996), 81–119.

55. See, for example, Vance Kepley Jr., "The Weaver Years at NBC," *Wide Angle* 12 (April 1990): 46–63, and "From 'Frontal Lobes' to the 'Bob and Bob Show': NBC Management and Programming Strategies, 1949–65," in *Hollywood in the Age of Television*, ed. Tino Balio (Boston: Unwin-Hyman, 1990), 41–62; Lynn Spigel, "The Making of a Television Literate Elite," in *The Television Studies Book*, ed. Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (London: Arnold, 1998), 63–85.

56. Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You? How Public TV Failed the People* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

57. ABC is now owned by Disney (which owns, for example, the Disney theme parks, radio stations, cable networks like ESPN and Lifetime, retail outlets, feature film companies, newspapers, and magazines); the multiple-system operator Comcast has recently bid for the now-struggling Walt Disney Company; CBS is owned by Viacom (which also owns, for example, Paramount Studios as well as cable networks like MTV and Nickelodeon, theme parks, and radio stations); NBC is owned by General Electric (which entered into a joint venture with Microsoft and owns MSNBC); and Fox is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. (which owns, for example, Fox Broadcasting; Fox News Channel; Fox Sports Net; motion picture companies; magazines like *TV Guide*, *Elle*, and *Seventeen*; book publishers; and numerous newspapers and delivers

entertainment and information to at least 75 percent of the globe). Meanwhile, media conglomerate Time-Warner owns a large number of cable channels, production companies, home video, magazines, music companies, and book publishers (for example, HBO, Cinemax, TNT, Comedy Central, E! Entertainment, Black Entertainment Television, Time-Life Video, Warner Bros. Television, Book of the Month Club, and its notorious deal with America Online). With telephone and cable operators acquiring and partnering with media corporations and moving into content, the synergy among these sectors is even more pronounced. These ownership structures make these media organizations more like vertically integrated movie studios of the classical period, as they have controlling stakes in all sectors of their industry—production, distribution, and exhibition—in addition to obvious benefits of owning multiple and related companies that reduce risk and increase opportunities for synergy between different companies in the umbrella corporation. Note, however, that the great instability of the technologies market (including, of course, the fate of AOL and the AOL–Time Warner merger) begs us to ask new questions regarding the future of media conglomeration and convergence.

58. Media conglomerates often say that consolidation of ownership leads to more choice (for example, some media conglomerates claim that consolidation of business holdings allows them to use income from their mainstream media outlets to launch minority channels). A variety of media activists, industry executives, media scholars, and government officials have, however, sharply attacked conglomeration and questioned the degree to which freedom of speech and diversity of representation can exist in a deregulated media system in which just a few major corporations own most of the media sources. See, for example, Patricia Aufderheide, *Communications Policy and the Public Interest: The Telecommunications Act of 1996* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Patricia Aufderheide, ed., *Conglomerates and the Media* (New York: New Press, 1997); Robert McChesney, *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997); Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 6th ed. (Beacon Press, 2000); Dean Alger, *Megamedia: How Giant Corporations Dominate Mass Media, Distort Competition, and Endanger Democracy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

59. Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 20.

60. Bruce A. Williams, “The New Media Environment, Internet Chatrooms, and Public Discourse after 9/11,” in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 183. It should be noted that the Pew Research Center found that nine out of ten Americans were getting their news primarily from television after the 9/11 attacks. See “Troubled Times for Network Evening News,” *Washington Post*, March 10. Citing an ABC News poll, however, Williams claims that “almost half of all Americans now get news over the Internet, and over a third of them increased their reliance on online sources after September 11” (“New Media Environment,” 176).

61. Williams, “New Media Environment,” 182. Although Williams cites various online attempts to draw ideological boundaries, he doesn’t necessary view this as a bad thing. While he admits that some such attempts were disturbing, he also argues that “insular conversations that are not easily accessible to the wider public play a positive role by allowing marginalized groups to clarify their distinct values in opposition to those of the society-at-large within the safety of a sympathetic and homogeneous group” (184). Despite his pointing to the insular nature of the Web and the desire of some groups to draw ideological boundaries, Williams also argues that there was a general air of civility on the Internet (188–89).

62. The administration viewed the presence of Al Jazeera’s graphic war footage and bin Laden’s videotapes (which were aired around the world) as a grave problem. On October 3, 2001 (a few days before the bombings began), Secretary of State Colin

Powell asked the Qatari emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, to “tone down” Al Jazeera’s inflammatory rhetoric, and the Bush administration specifically requested that the tapes be taken off the network. The International Press Institute sent a letter to Colin Powell, stating that Powell’s tactics had “serious consequences for press freedom” (176–77). Al Jazeera journalists defended their coverage of graphic images by stating that they were trying to cover the war objectively, from both sides (Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, *Al Jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*, updated ed. [Cambridge, Mass.: Westview Press, 2002], 176–81). See also El-Nawawy and Iskandar’s discussion of Europe’s and Al Jazeera’s coverage of Afghanistan (*ibid.*, 186–89).

63. Jonathan Burston, “War and the Entertainment Industries: New Research Priorities in an Era of Cyber-Patriotism,” in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 163–75. For more, see James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial Media Entertainment Network* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001). At ICT, technologies such as immersive simulation games are being developed simultaneously for entertainment and military uses.

64. A member of the Bush administration met with Hollywood studio chiefs and network executives in Beverly Hills on October 18 to discuss efforts to “enhance the perception of America around the world.” See Peter Bart, “H’wood Enlists in War,” *Variety.com*, October 17, 2001, 1–3. A few weeks later, they gathered in what was referred to as a “summit” to discuss more detailed plans for Hollywood’s participation in the war effort. See Rick Lyman, “White House Sets Meeting with Film Executives to Discuss War on Terrorism,” *Variety.com*, November 8, 2001, 1–3. See also Pamela McClintock, “Nets Rally Stars around Flag,” *Variety.com*, December 3, 2001, 1–2.

65. Meanwhile, in a connected fashion, Al Jazeera’s presence also threatens the hegemony of Western global news sources. Driven by fierce competition for Arab audiences, in January 2002 CNN officially launched its Arabic Web site, CNNArabic.com. See Nouredine Miladi, “Mapping the Al Jazeera Phenomenon,” in Thussu and Freedman, eds., *War and the Media*, 159. Note that CNN launched the Web site at the same time (January 2002) that Al Jazeera withdrew its exclusivity agreement with CNN because of the dispute over a tape CNN aired without its approval.

66. In a provocative thesis, Bret Maxwell Dawson argues that while TV returned to much of its previous content, television’s temporal and narrational forms were “traumatized” by 9/11. He argues that the effects of this trauma can be seen in the way that elements of catastrophe television (e.g., live broadcasts, an aura of authenticity, and an obsession with time) have appeared with increasing popularity in reality TV and programs like Fox’s *24*. See his “TV since 9/11” (master’s thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2003). While I would not posit such deterministic notions of trauma, it does seem useful to think about how 9/11 relates to a particular historical conjuncture in aesthetic ideals of TV realism, and in particular TV’s obsession with the reality genre and real time (which, as Dawson admits, began before 9/11).

67. This cycle of memorializing documentaries began with CBS’s *9/11* (aired March 10, 2002), which was followed by *Telling Nicholas* (HBO, May 12, 2002), *In Memoriam: New York City, 9.11* (HBO, May 26, 2002), and others. For a seminar I taught at UCLA, Sharon Sharp wrote a very interesting paper “Remembering 9/11: Memory, History, and the American Family,” which considers how these documentaries used sentimental images of the family in crisis to tell histories of 9/11.

68. Baudrillard and Virilio both have published monographs on 9/11. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002); Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002).