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## In Focus: The Media and the New Cold War

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## In Focus: The Media and the New Cold War

*edited by Dennis Broe and Louise Spence*

Many intellectuals are angry and saddened by the simplistic and self-righteous moral absolutes expressed by the Bush administration; the shameless use of the events of September 11, 2001, to justify an assault on civil liberties; the unprecedented buildup of the American military; and the threats of unilateral devastation directed at other nations. Many are also angry and saddened by the media's collusion in the fog of fear spreading over the United States, the media's role in the extraordinarily aggressive conduct of the government in silencing dissent, and the media's docility in the face of enlarged presidential power, secrecy, and belligerence. The attacks on the United States have transformed the politics and policies of the nation.

Is this transformation a totally new order? Or does it hark back to earlier times? At the 2003 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, the honoree, Noël Burch, issued a challenge from the podium. He suggested that members confront the most dangerous discourse prevailing in the media today—the one that seeks to unseat the multicultural world and install once again a paranoid view of the United States and its Other in a myopic “us”-against-“them” scenario. A cultural blockade has been erected, like the one that characterized the Cold War, with the United States casting itself, as Annabelle Sreberny recently put it, as the “global universal.”<sup>1</sup>

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there has clearly been a change in the media—both news and entertainment (although they are difficult to separate these days). The change is evident in a number of ways, from the president's staging of a press conference that emulates a Hollywood blockbuster to prime-time television cop shows promoting government agencies formerly viewed with suspicion. Hollywood has deluged us with war films that trumpet previous military conquests or that incite the populace to panic, while “embedded” reporters blatantly promote the Pentagon's point of view.

These changes in the media are certainly attendant upon changes in broader social and economic formations, including the level of global economic exploitation and nuclear arms proliferation. Do these changes signal a return to the mindset of the last endless war—the war against communism—that began in the late 1940s? Is there, perhaps, as in the previous era, a new Pax Americana disguised as a war between equals, then the United States and the Soviet Union, now the United States and a global, deadly, unseeable, unknowable enemy called terrorism? Is the global “war on terrorism” a cunning political myth designed to pave the way for the new American empire? Are the current media aiding and abetting the White House as the media of the late 1940s and 1950s promoted the Red Scare? How have the immediacy of new technologies and digital-cybernetic

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culture influenced or hindered our acceptance of centrally scripted, real-time, live global imagery—or the authority of processed information? How have deregulation and the predominant corporate climate contributed to the trends toward consolidation and the expression of fewer independent opinions? What can academics, cinema and media studies academics in particular, add to social criticism, social activism, and politics as the horror of war shudders through our lives?

The essays that follow address these questions—and more. They challenge, modify, or affirm aspects of the Cold War analogy and of the media's role in the profound and multifaceted post-9/11 environment. Dennis Broe argues that the alliance of the media with globalization and permanent war is imprinted on the Fox television show *24*. James Castonguay examines the way the endless war has invaded media culture. Linda Dittmar reflects on the dangers of the new cold war's "us"-versus-"them" rhetoric and explains how both the U.S. and Israeli media participate in it. Patricia Keeton looks at how events of the "old" cold war, particularly the U.S. complicity in the violent overthrow of President Salvador Allende in Chile on September 11, 1973, beg a review of the events of September 11, 2001. Anna McCarthy questions whether the characterization of a new cold war might not imply an aversion to the movements that have grown up in the wake of the end of the cold war against communism. Christopher Sharrett considers the current administration's war-making propaganda in the context of twentieth-century imperialist history. And Noël Burch responds.

January 2004

## Notes

1. Annabelle Sreberny, "Trauma Talk: Reconfiguring the Inside and the Outside," in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism after September 11* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 223.

## Fox and Its Friends: Global Commodification and the New Cold War

by Dennis Broe

Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, the Fox Network's parent entity, is, of the nine major media conglomerates (along with Viacom, Bertelsmann, Warners, Sony, Liberty Media, AT&T, GE, and Disney),<sup>1</sup> the most global in scope—"the only real global media company that covers the world"<sup>2</sup>—and often seen as the model global media conglomerate. What are the characteristics of this model? First, a drive toward accumulation expressed as either a desire to gain total control of a market or to link with other conglomerates and share control. Second, an almost frenzied fetishization of the value of "entertainment," extended both to news and fictional forms. Third, where possible, an expression of open support for the current paradigm of ruling

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