

Enduring Freedom: War, Corporate Television, and the Delusion of the Delusion

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“Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?”

--Russell Crowe as Maximus in the film *Gladiator* (2000)

When the policy and propaganda divisions of the current Bush Administration set out to generate a rhetoric that could be mobilized to inaugurate a new “foreign policy” in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, they inadvertently radicalized Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of truth as a “moveable army of metaphors and metonymies” by instrumentalizing this concept to achieve a clearly stated set of interlocking stratagems: to reinterpret the meaning of “terrorism,” to establish precedent for the disregard of international law and the will of the electorate, and to rule the global community by force.^[1] In the months leading up to the second Gulf War, elements of this rhetoric were mobilized to justify any number of highly questionable maneuvers, ranging from the attack on Afghanistan to the inhumane treatment of Taliban detainees at Guantánamo Bay, a treatment that was legitimized by the Administration through a particularly narrow and aberrant interpretation of the Geneva Convention, limiting POW status—and, effectively, the human rights of prisoners—to combatants deriving from conventionally recognized nation states.^[2] During the second Gulf War itself, the Administration and its variegated agents once again attempted to declare any critique of its actions off-limits by deploying the catachrestic and perplexing trope “Support Our Troops”—catachrestic and perplexing because in actuality the troops are supposed to support us, not the other way around.^[3] Since then, under the patronage of a new so-called Department of Homeland Security, the moveable army of tropes has colonized an ever broadening terrain, including even the American system of higher education, in which foreign students attending colleges and universities across the country are now forced to pay a “special fee” that is used by the government to fund the surveillance of these students through a database and tracking program called “SEVIS.”

A first attempt at organizing the various international platoons of the new rhetoric under a single guiding name resulted in the term “Operation Infinite Justice,” a cynical phrase that was quickly abandoned when it became increasingly obvious that it not only conjured specters of ruthless Christian crusades throughout the Islamic world but also

taunted Muslim communities whose faith teaches that Allah alone is capable of delivering Infinite Justice—and, at any rate, not George W. Bush and his generals. In an attempt to moderate, if only slightly, the moveable armies of tropes—that, since the scandalous and highly irregular presidential election of 2000, had made Bush and his cabinet appear extremist even in the eyes of many conservatives—the new name given to the Administration’s future foreign policy was “Operation Enduring Freedom.” But the topological difficulties did not end there, as the putatively improved name bespeaks the continued, haunting presence of the specter of the Other whose fate it is to be subjected to the logic of this euphemism. While “enduring,” when read adjectivally, yields an image of freedom as lasting and durable, when read as a progressive verb form, “enduring” evokes the perspectives of all those victims who from this point on will be forced to endure the violent implementation of “freedom” as the Bush regime now defines it for its globalized empire. Thus, the uncontainable double movement of “enduring” ironically allows the Other to speak, even if only through a prosopopeia—the ghostly voice of an absent or dead speaker—as the site of a relentless will to implement world domination. We could say that the sudden and now half-forgotten shift from “Operation Infinite Justice” to “Operation Enduring Freedom” hauntingly reemerges in the double meaning encrypted within the latter phrase.

That this shift, along with many other shifts in the rhetorical armies so effectively mobilized in the current Administration, is first and foremost tied to the media branch of what Guy Debord as early as the 1960s termed *la société du spectacle*, the society of the spectacle, is rather uncontroversial. Indeed, the complicity of the commercial mass media in the propagandistic dissemination of the Administration’s policies has given the traditional term “war theater” a new meaning. But any analysis that seeks to articulate the techno-ideological affinities between the Administration’s army of tropes and the televisual episteme by which they are mediated, must measure itself against Fredric Jameson’s dictum that “thinking anything adequate about commercial television may well involve ignoring it and thinking about something else.”^[4] This view seems to suggest that one would learn the most from commercial television by investing one’s attention elsewhere and remaining silent about it. But what this view also sponsors, despite its own intentions, is an emphasis on what one might call the general “other-directedness” of presentation as it manifests itself in the specific medium of commercial television.^[5] Thus, to understand the workings of this medium, one must indeed look elsewhere—not, however, in a gesture that abandons the project of understanding the medium but rather in a gesture of taking seriously the elusive other-directedness that it shares in principle with all acts of presentation and with all media but with which it is saturated in *television-specific* ways.

Whichever reading of Jameson’s view one prefers, it is difficult—in light of the far-reaching *Gleichschaltung*, or total coordination, of the various corporate media, for which the name “Fox News” today may stand as a particularly disturbing metonymy—to imagine a perspective from which these techno-medial manifestations could be submitted to scrutiny. As Martin Heidegger once observed, “this is precisely what is so uncanny: that everything functions and that this functioning leads to a further functioning and that technics uproots the human being more and more, tearing him away from the earth.”^[6] The

effort of techno-ideological media coordination now includes everything from a nationwide streamlining of war news coverage in which a “balanced” debate often entails nothing more than active generals arguing with retired generals, to internet stores such as America’sNewWarStore.com that sell paraphernalia to indulge the fantasies and fetishes of war enthusiasts, to radio coverage of the war that, even on NPR, routinely was saturated with ominous music intended to make “Operation Enduring Freedom” and the occupation of Iraq entertaining and palatable. Here, indeed, “to be entertained is to be in agreement [*Vergnügtsein heißt Einverständensein*],” as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno once aptly put it.^[7] That these musical accompaniments, or soundtracks, to the latest war-related news are meant to be as entertaining, care-free, and self-evident as the recognizable graphics and slogans used in corporate television coverage—“Showdown with Iraq,” “Target Iraq,” etc.—suggests a final erasure of the borders between the remnants of journalism worthy of its name and the logic of Hollywood blockbusters that represent the apotheosis of a certain culture industry whose extreme abstraction, in the language of Horkheimer and Adorno, creates subjects through “a compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which they simultaneously see through” and for whom “personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from armpit odor and emotions.”^[8] In short, recognizing the extensive media network that ever more effectively mobilizes a moveable army of metaphors, metonymies and, now, television images, may lead either to a certain disenchanting resistance to analysis altogether or to a false derealization of the effects of “Operation Enduring Freedom” and of the war on Iraq as though they were spectacular but ephemeral manifestations of mere media simulacra.

The extreme version of the latter position is to be found in Jean Baudrillard’s provocative assertion, apropos of the first Gulf War, that, in light of the virtuality and infinitely mediated nature of that war for those in the West, “the Gulf War did not take place.” The war, so the argument goes, was made to seem unreal through the post-human perspectival regimes offered by a far-reaching web of simulacra: by cameras fastened atop so-called smart bombs and by other infinite chains of televisual signifiers that could never record the event “itself” or even grant representational access to the reality of the event.^[9] We might say that, to the extent that such images can claim any relationship to empirical reality, they are today, at the beginning of the millennium, at best recognizable as one among many iterations of the latest consumer penchant for so-called Reality TV, productions that in their stagy qualities and contrived constructions of naturalness can never, despite their permanent and seductive claims to the contrary, quite move beyond exhibiting, not reality itself, but, in a gesture of exhausting repetition, one more iteration of what Roland Barthes once memorably termed *l’effet de réel*--the “reality effect.”^[10]

In a recent meditation on the medial specificity and textuality of television, Jacques Derrida warns against too hastily adopting a neoidealistic view that would deny the event itself. He suggests that

the requisite deconstruction of this *artificiality* should not be used as an alibi. It should not give way to an inflation (*une surenchère*) of the simulacrum and neutralize every threat in what might be called the delusion of the delusion, the denial of the event:

“Everything,” people would then think, “even violence, suffering, war, and death, everything is constructed, fictionalized, constituted by and for the media apparatus. Nothing ever really happens. There is nothing but simulacrum and delusion.” While taking the deconstruction of artifactuality as far as possible, we must therefore do everything in our power to guard against this critical neoidealism and remember, not only that a consistent deconstruction is a thinking of singularity, and therefore of the event, of what it ultimately preserves of the irreducible, but also that “information” is a contradictory and heterogeneous process. It can and must be transformed, it can and must serve, as it has often done, knowledge, truth, and the cause of democracy to come, and all the questions they necessarily entail. We cannot help but hope that artifactuality, as artificial and manipulative as it may be, will surrender or yield to the coming of what comes, to the event that bears it and toward which it is borne. And to which it will bear witness, even if only despite itself.^[11]

According to the logic of Derrida’s suggestion, then, the challenge would be to confront the delusion of the delusion, the delusion that there is *only* delusion, and that this delusion is so delusional that it is thought even to erase the concrete suffering and death of those whose fates are subjected both to weapons and televisual recording devices. In this case, the truth of suffering, and even of its medial presentation would potentially exist—but not *for us*. (Perhaps it is no coincidence that the enormously popular television series *The X-Files*, broadcast on the self-avowedly right-leaning FOX network, was organized around two paranoid mantras that interlock in each episode to paralyzing effect: “The Truth is out there” but “Trust no one.”)^[12] The delusion of the delusion would fail to take account of the internal self-differentiation of the delusion, the way in which delusion can never be *fully and completely* itself, that is, *only* delusional. The delusion opens up within itself its own other, non-delusion, even as it powerfully dissimulates the ways in which it is at odds with itself: in global networks and in the medial transmissions and material disseminations of delusional tropes and images.

Engaging this problematic, we might say that it would be misleading to suggest with Baudrillard that the Gulf War did not take place, even in the figurative or tropological sense. Rather, the war did *not only* take place and it did *not only not* take place. Yet what would it mean to develop a critical strategy that would do justice to this double challenge: the paralyzing threat of the delusion of the delusion, on the one hand, and, on the other, the problematic prospect of reverting to a neo-realism that takes mediated signs for reality rather than for reality effects, a literalism that falls prey to the understandable but misguided desire, outlined in Paul de Man’s concept of aesthetic ideology, in which “what we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism”?^[13] Such questions cannot be settled in the abstract alone but should be complicated and elaborated apropos of singular events of presentation and acts of signification that take their medial specificity into account. Here, I wish to consider one such singular medial act in the spirit of these larger concerns: US corporate television’s “live”

coverage of the toppling of a giant statue of Saddam Hussein upon the invasion of Baghdad by US military forces on Wednesday, 9 April 2003.

When the American forces entered the Iraqi capital on that day, they took great pains to aestheticize their military interventions in the city so as to make the display of dominance available as a world-wide televisual spectacle. The center piece of this aestheticization of military violence was the wrapping, around 6:50 p.m. Baghdad time and 10:50 a.m. American EST, of huge metal chains around the neck of a monumental statue of Hussein—erected on Baghdad's Firdos Square in April 2002 to celebrate the despot's 65th birthday—whose head first was covered by US military troops in an American flag, then in the pre-1991 Iraqi flag. Lest this scene be interpreted throughout the Arab world as the figurative beheading of an Arab leader by the United States, both flags were quickly removed by an American soldier who left the monument undraped. When a powerful US Marine armored recovery vehicle then slowly but steadily pulled the statue down—with its raised right arm now no longer saluting skyward but awkwardly descending toward the ground—what appeared to be a huge mob of citizens of Baghdad could be seen at the lower edge of the television screen waiting for the statue to hit the ground. Once the statue came within reach of the congregation, they were shown celebrating this event by pounding the remains of the statue, tearing off its head and kicking it through the dust in a delirious frenzy, as well as beating it with removed shoes in a gesture that constitutes an especially grave insult in Arab cultures.

What was remarkable about the staging of this event which was broadcast “live” on corporate networks such as CNN was the made-for-television quality of the spectacle that left viewers with the distinct impression that the Iraqi people were celebrating the American forces as liberators from a tyrannical regime rather than rejecting them as an occupying force. After all, the sheer number of Baghdad citizens who converged to celebrate the toppling of Hussein appeared to speak volumes about a general sentiment among the Iraqi people. But this impression, as it turned out, was created through heavily orchestrated televisual editing of the “live” event. What viewers of CNN and other corporate networks were mostly shown was in fact a closely cropped framing of citizens gathering on the market place over which Hussein's statue presided—as though their numbers were in the thousands. However, a different shot of the “same” event, very briefly seen on a local-access independent channel, revealed, from a high-angle long shot, that the group gathered on the expansive market place was rather small, almost difficult to discern in the overall image. Thus, what was a fairly limited display of a relatively small group of people in a metropolis of some four million inhabitants was manufactured by the corporate networks and their so-called embedded reporters to yield the false impression of an extensive popular uprising among Iraqis who putatively joined the American invaders in their fanatical hatred of Hussein—and, by unspoken extension, supposedly legitimated the American military aggression that most of the international community, including most European allies in the United Nations, had harshly condemned.

Indeed, the work of independent photographers such as the Finnish photojournalist Ilkka Uimonen bears out the sense that the televisual images shown on American corporate networks were edited and manipulated in strict conformity with the American government's ideological requirements. Without claiming epistemological superiority for the documentary

photograph over the moving image or suggesting that there could ever be an objective or transparent presentation of history as it “really was,” it is nevertheless possible to develop a very different understanding of the events on Firdos Square in light of this other evidence (Figure 1). As with the many other important images by Uimonen that testify to the dark underbelly of the attack on Iraq—such as a photograph of a father and a son lying dead on the bloody front seats of their car after having been executed by US marines and the close-ups of the horrified civilians’ faces upon witnessing the violent eruption of American soldiers into their sphere—his photograph of the removal of Hussein’s statue raises significant questions. One of the most striking features of this particular image is the size of the crowd gathered to witness the spectacle. Both the group of witnesses that is almost exclusively confined to the lower left portion of the image and the few heads of scattered spectators visible in outline in the foreground bespeak the relative smallness of the gathering. This sense stands in marked contrast to the images that were broadcast on “live” corporate television. We may even say that the raised hands of the civilian visible in the lower right portion of the image enact the ambivalence, and even indeterminacy, that the televisual images of the “same” spectacle, concerned with imposing a single and stable meaning on this complex event, so fervently sought to foreclose: are the man’s hands raised in jubilation or in horrified disbelief? The stakes of this unanswered question are high because it strikes at the heart of the historical status and the political meaning of the American “liberation” of Iraq.

What made the televisual spectacle of the events on Firdos Square so effective when it was transmitted on the major networks was not simply the finesse and technical proficiency with which it staged and reinforced the Administration’s ideological commitments. After all, biased war reporting can certainly occur in print media or on internet news sites as well. And even a still photograph can be—and, since the invention of photography in the middle of the nineteenth century, always has been—manipulated: through techniques of cropping, lightening and darkening, montage, perspectival shifting, special effect lenses, film sensitivity, etc., so that even the “reality” of so-called documentary photography is always heavily staged and constructed. But what makes the televisual image so seemingly immune, in the moment of its reception, to the critical gaze of distanciation and analysis is precisely its pretense to broadcast a “live” event, transmitted from reality itself, unconstructed, unproduced, and unmediated, through a representational window on the fully referential empirical world itself. Here, Hussein’s severed head bespeaks and radicalizes the “live” event’s allegiance to a mimetic ideology.

What a “live” broadcast dissimulates is precisely the delusion that, as Deborah Esch puts it, “visibility translates as cognitive availability,” when in fact the “unproblematic articulation of live TV with the real (and with real time) has its impulse in a broader realist ideology that finds its opportunity in the failure to reflect on the medium, on the distances of space and time that characterize its structure and effects.”^[14] As Esch reminds us, the “live” broadcast is inscribed in the “generalized fantasy that the image is *direct* (functioning as if it were not a technology of representation but somehow an unmediated presentation that would render analysis moot) and *direct for me* (as if it were addressed to me, here and now, by an other of myself, in the familiar guise of the evening news anchor.” Accordingly, she continues, it is “crucial to resist the seductions of this generalized fantasy and to recall in

particular the temporality of ‘live’ news broadcasting, ‘the complex interplay of image and sound that makes the news prerecorded even as it goes out live.’”^[15] Disregarding the technically mediated and postponed nature of the live image, which comes to us in the guise of the “real,” may promise a final return to the referent in an age in which referentiality itself is so severely problematized—but this promise comes at a price, a *Versprechen* that in German means both to promise and to misspeak. When the highly mediated and produced image of a “live” transmission such as the toppling of Hussein’s statue is mistaken, even in the unconscious, for the event itself, that is, when the presentational structure is confused with a referent and when televisual images of people are confused with the empirical people themselves—then the ideology of a purely reproductive form of mimesis threatens to foreclose what remains to be thought in the ways in which an event, and even television as medium, is at odds with itself and, in this self-differentiation, deserves to be *read closely*. To refuse to subscribe fully to this realist fantasy of the “live” broadcast and to watch television the way that Walter Benjamin wishes to read the image of history itself—that is, “*gegen den Strich*,” against the grain—can be a decisively political act that will not content itself with older models of merely content-based *Ideologiekritik* that often disregard the presentational specificity of the medium with which they engage.

Perhaps more than any of the other new media, television resists the viewer’s efforts at such an anti-realist reading against the grain. One of the multiple ways in which it resists such a reading is encoded in the tendency to make available to the viewing subject not only a multitude of different perspectives but also perspectives that the visual mechanism of a human body could never assume. For instance, in the “live” broadcast of NASCAR races, a multitude of cameras may be installed within a race car to transmit simultaneously a number of images that, in their radical heterogeneity of perspectives, the “naked” human eye—constrained by internal optical mechanics and by limitations of time and space—could not receive all at once. Or, in the case of Hussein’s toppled statue, several perspectives were assumed by the camera’s lense hovering slightly above the event, from a quasi-omniscient, “supervisory” point in space that no human eye could assume on its own. Rather than working to destabilize the realism of the mimetic ideology—with “artificiality” acting as analytic distancing and defamiliarization—the mobilization of such perspectives contributes to the apotheosis of the medial gaze they sponsor. Precisely because a perspective is “post-human,” it is not fully available to human critique and close analysis. Indeed, it tendentially paralyzes the very idea of a limited human subject reading the more powerful technical and post-human gaze of the recording and transmitting apparatus against the grain.

With such displacement and expansion of the human perspective in television, what is at stake is not simply the perception of this or that image but the logic and status of vision itself. As Samuel Weber tells us, “what one looks at in watching television is not first and foremost images. As the name of the medium says very precisely, one looks at *a certain kind of vision*” which is “taking place not simply on the screen but simultaneously—or rather, quasi-simultaneously, since there is always a time-lag—somewhere else.” This vision possesses a specificity that is inseparable from television as a medium. As Weber continues:

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why one does not usually speak, in English, of “seeing” television but rather of “watching” it. To

“see something” suggests a more or less direct contact of perceiver and perceived; and this in turn implies the givenness of an object to be *seen*: a *perceptum*. We do not on the other hand speak of “*looking at a television program*.” To “look at” entails a far more mediate, more distanced relationship. As the “at” makes clear, we are dealing with an indirect object. But the verb that is most specific to television is not “looking at” but rather “watching.” For we still speak of “looking at a painting” or a “photograph”; but we would rarely dream of *watching* them. (Interestingly, we also do not speak of “watching” a film.) Rather, we watch events whose outcome is in doubt, like sporting events. To *watch* carries with it the connotation of a scrutiny that suggests more and less than mere *seeing* or *looking at*. To watch is very close to *watching out for* or *looking out for*, that is, being sensorially alert for something that *may* happen. In the case of television, the primary “object” of our watching is neither a particular image nor even a particular program: it is the medium itself, which includes its institutions—above all, stations and networks.^[6]

If, then, the “object” of televisual watching is the act of watching itself, we might inquire into the status that the televisual mode of seeing is accorded when it assumes this or that specific form. For, while Weber is surely right to insist that seeing televisually always means watching and seeing the medium as such, that general watching and viewing must always take the shape of a *singular* form, even as that form is inseparable from all other quasi-identical forms. That is to say, the general kind of seeing that television stages can never not be in the form of this or that particular and singular presentation, this or that event or image. Thus, while the network coverage of Hussein’s statue was certainly inscribed in the more general mechanisms and techno-ideological commitments of all other network coverage—indeed, could not have made any sense to the audience without these *arche*-inscriptions—it nevertheless mobilized a set of specific images, or a particular kind of watching and monitoring, the so-called liberation of Baghdad as it was allegorized in the toppled and subsequently disfigured monument of the despot.

We might ask, then, what it is in the televisual medium that makes this tension between, on the one hand, what Weber calls watching the medium itself and, on the other, the specificity and constraints of a particular televised event, available as a *potentially* readable text to the human subject. What is it that mediates the different layers of the mediation at work in the medium of television? And how, ultimately, might these open questions be inflected by the techno-ideological particularity of recent war coverage?

One way of approaching these issues is to acknowledge that there is a deep and knotted relationship between the tensions in the presentational and transmissive strategies of television and certain unresolved psychic tensions. Half a century ago, when television was still in its infancy as a “new medium,” Adorno devoted his attention to it in a series of interrelated studies from the early 1950s, including his American essay for the Hacker Foundation, “How to Look at Television,” and his German essays “Prolog zum Fernsehen”

(“Prologue to Television”) and “Fernsehen als Ideologie” (“Television as Ideology”).^[17] In the 1953 “Prolog zum Fernsehen” we read:

The analogy to the two totalitarian states of both versions imposes itself; the more that which diverges (*das Auseinanderweisende*) is integrated under a dictatorial will, the more disintegration progresses, the more that which does not inherently belong together but is merely externally added up falls apart. The gapless world of images (*lückenlose Bilderwelt*) becomes cracked. On the surface the audience is not much disturbed by this. But it surely knows about it unconsciously. The suspicion that the reality being served up is not the one that it pretends to be will grow. But this does not at first lead to resistance; rather, one loves, with clenched teeth, the unavoidable and the deeply hated all the more fanatically.^[18]

When television creates the illusion of integration, the mobilization of all its heterogeneous images into the hegemony of a single meaning—not of this or that meaning, but of meaning itself—a sense that is identical to itself and that can be transmitted and received in and as this self-identity, it does so by violently forcing into conformity what has no common measure and by creating the false impression that this conformity of meaning is natural and self-evident when in fact it is carefully produced and edited, even when it is shown “live.” Yet television is not capable of *only* perpetuating itself in this strategy of dissimulation, it is also interrupted by incalculable moments that in the blink of an eye flash up briefly to disturb the picture of total integration and smooth meaning, much like Barthes’s erratic *punctum* disturbs or “pricks” the intended surface or *studium* of a photograph, a model that implicitly borrows from Benjamin’s notion of the “optical unconscious.”^[19] This tension makes the *lückenlose Bilderwelt* precisely *lückenhaft*, full of gaps. What we could call, extending Adorno, the gappy *Lückenhaftigkeit* of the *lückenlose Bilderwelt* will not yield to the prescriptions of a certain kind of reading against the grain, an analytic application of the critique of televisual ideology. After all, the *Lückhaftigkeit* of television’s *lückenhafte Bilderwelt* is lodged not in conscious cognition and its faculties of enlightenment but in the unconscious. Because this knowledge is unconscious, it cannot yield critique or interruption but causes a perverse identification with the simultaneously hated and fetishized object. Thus, while viewers of the war coverage on CNN or FOX unconsciously “know” that the constructed smoothness of the *Bilderwelt* and its singularity of meaning are in fact porous and delusional, they come to fetishize this delusion and the virtual character of its ideologically overdetermined transmission. This fetishization comes about not in spite of the delusional character of its object but rather because of it. The affectively charged object—the delusional, cartoonish, biased war coverage in its television-specific modes of dissemination—is simultaneously loathed and eroticized, eroticized in its loathfulness and loathed in its eroticization. As a viewer of television images of US army tanks rolling into Baghdad and of Hussein’s statue being toppled, I may have an unconscious suspicion that the “reality” of this so-called live coverage is being manufactured for me, but I still tune in—I loathe myself as the one who watches the delusional spectacle and I transfer my deep-seated but dissimulated disgust with the televisual spectacle on to myself as the one who enjoys it. In this narcissistic move, what I

unconsciously love, hate, and fetishize in the televisual transmission is, among other things, myself as the perverse, proto-pornographic subject.

If television compels this kind of unconscious identification and displacement, it could be said to be inscribed in a grammar that links the destructive drive and the death drive. In his 1932 correspondence with Albert Einstein, published in 1933 as “*Warum Krieg?*” (“Why War?”), Sigmund Freud situates the psyche’s propensity for war in its aggressive drives that can never be fully mastered. Taking up concerns that had first occupied him in his 1915 meditation “*Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod*” (“Timely Meditations on War and Death”) and elaborating on the conceptual relays between the dynamic constitution of the individual psyche and broader cultural processes and aberrations in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and Its Discontents*) of 1930, Freud writes:

Yet I wish to linger for a while with our destructive drive (*Destruktionstrieb*) whose popularity by no means keeps pace with its meaning. For with the help of some speculation we have reached the view that this drive is at work within every living being and strives to bring this being to its fall, to return life to the condition of inanimate matter. It deserves in all seriousness the name death drive, while the erotic drive represents the strivings toward life. The death drive becomes a destructive drive in that it, with the help of special forces, is turned toward the outside, toward objects. The living being as it were preserves its own life by destroying that of another. But a part of the death drive remains at work within the living being (*Ein Anteil des Todestriebes verbleibt aber im Innern des Lebewesens tätig*), and we have attempted to deduce from this internalization of the destructive drive a whole series of normal and pathological phenomena.^[20]

If the destructive drive, despite its popularity as a conceptual category is, as Freud suggests, always one step ahead of any fixed meaning that one may attach to it, that is, if it is always already on the way to *another* venue, then this is in no small measure due to the perpetually shifting movement to which it itself is constantly subjected: the vacillation between, and imbrication of, the destructive drive and the death drive, their ceaseless gestures of externalization and internalization. As opposed to the erotic drive, which generally works to affirm life, the death drive can become, in the destructive drive, a form of other-directedness. In its fluctuation between self-directedness and other-directedness, the death drive either threatens to eradicate the self that it traverses or else it works, now in the guise of the destructive drive and in a movement that protects the self from annihilation, upon an external object. By destroying the object or the Other, the death drive is paid its due without undoing the self that experiences it. The self traversed by the death drive maintains itself in the annihilation of the Other as fetishized enemy-object, and war itself becomes the radicalization of this displacement.^[21] But, as psychoanalysis observes, a strange residue remains even in the psyche that has transformed the death drive into the other-directed form of the destructive drive: something cannot fully be transformed; something resists and persists as an unassimilatable remainder. Freudian theory more

generally gives the effects of this unassimilatable remainder a variety of distinct but interlaced names: conscience, sublimation, or religion, among others.

We could say that the corporate networks' coverage of the second Gulf War made available to the viewing subject this doubly coded displacement. On the one hand, it participated in the gesture of the other-directedness of the death drive in that it allowed the subject to transform the death drive into the destructive drive by staging the televisual theatricality of attacking and killing the external enemy-object. Yet, on the other hand, it *also* helped to lodge within the watching subject the spectral presence of an unassimilatable remainder, a ghostly form of self-differentiation that would not fully yield to the self-identity and relative stability of the production of the destructive drive and its hostile engagement with the fetishized enemy-object. This latter lodging of the remainder would seem to work against the transformative movement of externalized aggression, even as it enables it. The television coverage colonized and articulated the viewing subject so effectively, then, not in spite of these tensions but because of them. Indeed, what the war coverage showed and facilitated was not simply one more instance of a transformation of the self-directed death drive into the object-directed destructive drive in which an unassimilatable remainder persists—even though it was that, among other things. Rather, what the war coverage transmitted to the viewing subject was both this general economy of displacements and remainders *and* a self-reflexive image of the general logic of that very economy. In this way, the corporate networks delivered both the transformative mechanisms of displacement and a self-reflexive general commentary on the possibilities and limitations of these mechanisms. But rather than making this general self-reflexive commentary available as a site of resistance or otherness to the logic on which it comments and to the marching plan of the medium in which it occurs, the war coverage assimilated even the commentary on its psychic investments into the delusion of the *lückenlose Bilderwelt* that it disseminates. Here, the viewing subject is situated as the one whose resistance even to the delusion of the delusion, and to the violent virtualization of death and suffering, is refunctionalized and co-opted as part of that very delusion. The medium that makes all these gestures and displacements—as well as any commentary on them—possible is then valorized as the source of a posthuman pleasure in which the reality of suffering and death that is attached, in certain of its formulations, to the concept of the human, merges with the apparatus itself. As a form of psycho-epistemological “uploading” of the human into the technical network, its transmissions effectively scramble the building of *human* communities whose emotive attachments (Freud's “*Gefühlsbindungen*”) and willingness to transfer personal power to a non-violent communal idea or goal are, as Freud suggests to Einstein, the only thinkable tools and small hope in what remains of any struggle against violence, war, and perpetual genocide.

This transfer, based on repression and sublimation yet working against war and violence, is threatened, among other things, by the ways in which killing the enemy may be understood as the satisfaction of a deep-seated desire. Unlike the constitutional theory of Carl Schmitt—later a leading legal philosopher of the Nazi state—who, during the same year in which Freud composed his meditations, developed an influential philosophy that elaborated the fundamental distinction between friend and enemy into the concept of the

political as such, Freud's stance does not insist on the absolute actuality or reality of the enemy-other.^[22] Whereas Schmitt tirelessly argues that the distinction between friend and enemy must be *real*—that is, not *merely* rhetorically or representationally constructed—Freud implicitly challenges Schmitt's theory when he suggests that the fantasy of killing the other, and the desire that is inscribed in this hostile fantasy, expresses itself along imaginary and even phantasmagorically exaggerated psychic inventions of that very other. Within this fantasy of the other, Freud argues, the “killing of the enemy satisfies an instinctual tendency [*triefhafte Neigung*].” However, the “intention to kill can also be contradicted by the consideration that the enemy could be utilized for convenient service tasks if he is kept alive in an intimidated state. In that case violence contents itself with subordinating the enemy rather than killing him.” Freud continues to suggest that this scenario is “the beginning of the sparing of the enemy, but the conqueror must now fear the perpetual lust for revenge [*laufende Rachsucht*] of the conquered, giving up a piece of his security.”^[23] It would follow, then, that the repression of one's instinct to kill the enemy-other names both the condition of possibility of building human communities based on *Gefühlsbindungen* and signals, potentially, the continued repression and exploitation of the enemy-other whom one has kept alive. According to Freud's model, the repression of certain *triefhafte Neigungen* is thus no recipe or implementable program for the ethical treatment of the enemy-other or, indeed, any Other. Far from distancing itself from these tensions inscribed deep in the dark underbelly of culture, recent television war coverage exposes and radicalizes these very instincts, even if in highly mediated form. After all, we could say that the cruel theatricality of the war coverage speaks precisely to its viewers' *triebhaft* *Neigung* to kill—or see killed—the enemy-other on the mediating site of the television screen. That the invading soldiers, rather than killing the enemy-other, subject this enemy-other instead to exploitation and domination and thus make themselves perpetually vulnerable to revenge and guerrilla opposition, stages, on the quasi-pornographic screen of the so-called war theater, the psychic tensions that subconsciously traverse the instinctual life of the television-consuming subject itself. The continued attacks and erratic ambushes by Iraqis on the American occupiers since the official cessation of active military hostilities now exemplify this dynamic almost daily.

Far from resolving the difficulties presented by the delusion of the delusion, it is our perpetual engagement with the structural logic and televisual mediations of “enduring” freedom that names the stakes and the terms by which our reading of the world's textuality today is measured in ethico-political dimensions. Whether our *triebhaft* *Neigung* yields to the politically invested interventions of reading images in the critical, emphatic sense that turns around the uncontrollable aporias of presentation, or whether this *triebhaft* *Neigung* functions merely as one more weapon in an arsenal mobilizable at will by the US-led military-industrial-medial empire of global coordination, or *Gleichschaltung*, of geopolitical *Gleichschalten* as perpetual channel-surfing, or *Umschalten*, remains an open question. It deserves at any given moment—*now*—to be asked and thought one more time. After all, it is never “only” the Other, or other Others, but also always we ourselves, even ourselves as other and as other-directed, who are at stake.

^[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne," in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. 1, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich and Berlin: DTV and de Gruyter, 1999), 873-890, here 880. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are my own.

For general analyses of these new foreign policies and the so-called war on terror, see for instance Noam Chomsky's *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001) and his essay "Confronting the Empire," available at znet, the internet site of *Z Magazine*, under <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=11&ItemID=2938>>.

Genealogical aspects of the imbrication of technology and terrorism are outlined by Friedrich A. Kittler, "Von Staaten und ihren Terroristen," in Étienne Balibar, Friedrich A. Kittler, and Martin van Creveld, *Vom Krieg zum Terrorismus?*, Mosse-Lectures, Winter 2002-2003 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2003), 33-50.

^[2] See Judith Butler, "Guantánamo Limbo: International Law Offers Too Little Protection for the Prisoners of the New War," *The Nation*, April 1, 2002: 20-24.

^[3] The manifold rhetorical and political implications of this catachresis are perceptively analyzed in the context of the first Gulf War in Avital Ronell, "Support Our Tropes: Reading Desert Storm" and "Activist Supplement: Papers on the Gulf War," both in *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 269-291 and 292-304, respectively.

^[4] Fredric Jameson, "Reading without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-Text," in *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*, Nigel Fabb (ed.), (New York: Methuen, 1987), 199-223; quoted as the book motto of Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), n.p. For more recent critical assessments of the new media from epistemo-political perspectives, see Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (eds.), *Democracy and the New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) as well as Mary E. Hocks and Michelle R. Kendrick (eds.), *Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

^[5] I borrow the term "other-directedness" from Samuel Weber's discussion of textuality as "a figure that designates the *other-directedness of structures of signification*" which "entails an approach to the other as articulation and to articulation as other." "Catching Up With the Past," in *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 168-208, here 201.

^[6] Martin Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* 23 (31 May 1976): 193-219, here 206. Some of the television-specific implications for culture of this uncanny functioning are put into conceptual circulation by Vilem Flusser, "Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television," trans. Ursula Beiter, *German 20th Century Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher (New York: Continuum, 2003), 10-21.

^[7] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1989), 153.

^[8] *Ibid.*, 176.

^[9] See Jean Baudrillard, *La guerre du Golf n'a pas eu lieu* (Paris: Galilée, 1991) and "Der Feind ist verschwunden," *Der Spiegel* 45: 6 (4 February 1991), 220-21. For his views on the September 11 attacks, compare further *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002).

^[10] Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141-48.

^[11] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 5f.

^[12] I thank Sam Weber for our discussions of *The X-Files* and its relation to the current war coverage as well as for sharing with me in this context his as of yet unpublished essays "Networks, Netwar, and Narratives" and "The Joy of Killing," both of which speak in important ways to the imbrication

of questions of media presentation and the trajectories of certain US-led strategies of global domination.

^[13] Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory,” in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20, here 11. These concerns are enlarged and deepened in the essays collected in his *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

^[14] Deborah Esch, “No Time Like the Present,” in *In the Event: Reading Journalism, Reading Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 61-70, here 62 and 65.

^[15] Esch, “Missing In Action,” in *In the Event*, 71-76, here 76.

^[16] Weber, “Television: Set and Screen,” in *Mass Mediauras*, 108-128, here 118.

^[17] We might note that Adorno’s American essay is called “How to Look at Television” rather than “How to Watch Television”—it is the act of *looking* at television, turning it into an object of scrutiny, that requires critical instruction, whereas merely *watching* it, consuming it as a medium, requires little more training than does opening one’s mouth to devour a *Bratwurst*. Small wonder, then, that Adorno writes of television: “Like the husband to whom a fairy grants three wishes makes a sausage appear and then disappear again from his wife’s nose [*seinem Weib eine Bratwurst an die Nase und wieder fortzaubert*], so to whomever the ghost who dominates nature has granted the capability of seeing what is distant, sees only the usual, enriched by the lie that pretends it were something different and that spreads to yield the false sense of his existence.” Theodor W. Adorno, “Prolog zum Fernsehen,” in *Eingriffe. Neun kritische Modelle* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), 69-80, here 80.

^[18] In German, Adorno’s rich passage reads: “Die Analogie zu den totalitären Staaten beider Versionen drängt sich auf; je mehr, unter diktatorischem Willen, das Auseinanderweisende integriert wird, um so mehr schreitet die Disintegration fort, um so mehr fällt auseinander, was nicht von sich aus zusammengehört, sondern bloß äußerlich addiert wird. Die lückenlose Bilderwelt gerät brüchig. An der Oberfläche läßt sich das Publikum wenig davon stören. Unbewußt wird es davon wissen. Der Verdacht, daß die Realität, die man serviert, nicht die sei, für die sie sich ausgibt, wird wachsen. Nur führt das zunächst nicht zum Widerstand, sondern man liebt, mit verbissenen Zähnen, das Unausweichliche und zuinnerst Verhaßte um so fanatischer.” Adorno, “Prolog zum Fernsehen,” 72.

^[19] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

^[20] Sigmund Freud, “Warum Krieg?,” in *Studienausgabe*, Vol. 9, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000), 271-286, here 282.

^[21] It would be necessary to investigate the ways in which the fantasy of this enemy-other is constructed in corporate television more generally. A start has been made by Slavoj Žižek who points out that “every feature attributed to the Other is already present at the very heart of the USA. Murderous fanaticism? There are in the USA today more than two million Rightist populist ‘fundamentalists’ who also practice a terror of their own, legitimized by (their understanding of) Christianity. Since America is, in a way, ‘harboring’ them, should the US Army have punished Americans themselves after the Oklahoma bombing? And what about the way Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson reacted to the events of September 11, perceiving them as a sign that God had withdrawn His protection from the USA because of the sinful lives of the Americans, putting the blame on hedonist materialism, liberalism, and rampant sexuality, and claiming that America got what it deserved? The fact that this very same condemnation of ‘liberal’ America as the one from the Muslim Other came from the very heart of *l’Amérique profonde* should give us food for thought... George W. Bush himself had to concede that the most probable perpetrators of the anthrax attacks were not Muslim terrorists but America’s own extreme Right Christian fundamentalists—again, does not the fact that acts first attributed to an external enemy may turn out to be acts perpetrated by the very heart of *l’Amérique profonde* provide an unexpected confirmation of the thesis that the true clash is the clash within each civilization?” “Reappropriations: The Lesson of Mullah Omar,” in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 33-57, here 43f. One might add that several of the September 11th terrorists themselves were also “harbored” by the US itself, leading mostly banal suburban lives.

^[22] Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1963).

^[23] Freud, "Warum Krieg?," 276.