

## CHAPTER 21

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DISSENT, TRUTHINESS,  
AND SKEPTICISM IN THE  
GLOBAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE:  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
PROPAGANDA  
IN TIMES OF WAR

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## INTRODUCTION

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IN 2005, at the annual White House Press Correspondents' Dinner, Stephen Colbert performed what might be considered the most widely witnessed public moment in court jester history: the skewering of President George W. Bush who sat but a few feet away. Throughout the twenty-minute dress-down of Bush's foreign policy and religious mission against terrorists, Colbert critiqued the role of the press, specifically with respect to White House briefings of reality. Colbert began his monologue on topic with "truthiness," a concept he has repopularized on his nightly "fake news show" in character as Fox news host Bill O'Reilly:

Ladies and gentlemen of the press corps, Madame First Lady, Mr. President, my name is Stephen Colbert and tonight it's my privilege to celebrate this president. We're not so different, he and I. We get it. We're not brainiacs on the nerd patrol. *We're not members of the factinista.* We go straight from the gut, right sir? That's where the truth lies, right down here in the gut. (Daily Kos, 2006)

Defined in Colbert's segment "The Word" in October 2005, the concept of "truthiness" took off like wildfire, and its use—alongside Colbert's popularity—has continued to increase.<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, Colbert defined truthiness originally in relation to George Bush, and the lack of facts on which Bush's decisions were founded: "People love the President because he's certain of his choices as a leader, even if the facts that back him up don't seem to exist" (Horton, 2007). Further, "Truthiness is: 'What I say is right, and [nothing] anyone else says could possibly be true.' It's not only that I *feel* it to be true, but that I *feel* it to be true. There's not only an emotional quality, but there's a selfish quality."

The strange ethos of accepting Bush as the decider and not questioning his "facts" was epitomized one week after the attack on the Twin Towers, when renowned news anchor Dan Rather declared on national television: "George Bush is the president, he makes the decisions, and you know, as just one American, he wants me to line up, just tell me where" (Bennett et al, 2006a, p. 1). Rather's pledge of allegiance to Bush and to nationalism squarely opposes the myth of the objective journalist and highlights patriotic power in the climate of a presidency tied to war. Rather's expressed patriotism was only the tip of an iceberg.

The events of September 2001 invited a return of patriotism and propaganda. Commenting on a now widely recognized "slip" in anything like objective journalism, Thussu and Freedman (2010) are correct to observe that "White House control of information after 9/11" reached new heights<sup>2</sup> (p. 37). "Before the Spring of 2003," writes propaganda scholar Nicholas O'Shaughnessy (2004):

propaganda was a concept that had been relegated beyond the marginal to the irrelevant. Its conceptual identity was lost amid the new academic lexicon of persuasion, communication theory and the manipulation of consent," reduced to popular imaginings of "Bolsheviks" and "monochrome." (p. 1)

"Then," he continues, "there was Iraq."

By historical circumstance, government and corporate propaganda in the 21st century also faces serious opponents and other contenders in the race to define reality. The exponentially increased access to information communications technologies (ICTs), user-friendly software, and web-based forums and blogs has given rise to a new media landscape. No longer does only the victor write history; the rise of citizen journalism and web-based dissent proliferate contesting narratives of events such that fundamental epistemological questions regarding what counts as truth, knowledge, and "objectivity" overshadow reductive or singular accounts of political events. Never before in the history of press coverage of war, or any other kinds of events, have there existed communicative media so rapid, enabling peer-to-peer, many-to-many communications. Most certainly, the control the state had during the first Persian Gulf War (PGW) through CNN's monopoly on war coverage is now a phenomenon of the past (Wark, 1995). State and corporate agendas became faced with increasing challenges by the diverse, contesting, and alternative news

narratives and information made accessible through web-based media and digital technologies.

Access to the Internet offered new means of organizing a mass international anti-war action, resulting in the largest ever movement of this kind in history. On February 15, 2003 tens of millions of people around the globe took to the streets to protest the preemptive invasion of Iraq. At the same time, the traditional and corporate U.S. news coverage of the antiwar action, of dissent, and their central role in fabricating the “intelligence” that led to the invasion of Iraq also worked to marginalize the movement. Meanwhile, the rising blogosphere and avid use of listservs and global use of e-mail and web-based information circulation was revolutionizing the possibilities of scalable means of disseminating dissent.

Though the movement failed to stop the war, the international public protest revealed the capacity and reach of ICTs and the role they could play in resistance and changing the framing and agenda setting of the global stage and news media coverage of these voices of dissent. By 2005, the elasticity of “truth” by President Bush was no longer a paranoid conspiracy theory developed by Chomsky-ite believers in manufactured consent or the propaganda model of news.<sup>3</sup> The events of 9/11 brought propaganda back into frequent usage and study after a lull since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> The information wars had truly begun, creating a mediascape in which everything is propaganda, skepticism colors all perception, truthiness abounds, and the means to certainty rely on new modalities of collective intelligence and participatory politics.<sup>5</sup>

Within this new mediascape, audiences began turning significantly toward alternatives to mainstream and corporate-owned news sources. In the North American context, viewers tuned, instead, into “fake” news, alternative news, microblogs, milblogs, viral videos,<sup>6</sup> and international sources such as Al Jazeera English, alongside increased engagement in participatory social media, citizen journalism and user-generated content (UGC) through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. In fact, Facebook is increasingly an important source of news content for the digital generation (Glynn, Huge & Hoffman, 2012).

For the twenty-first century, it is appropriate to understand much of this media landscape as an “information war.” Referred to by some scholars as “chaos” (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2010), the successful deployment of propaganda poses more challenges to government and military control than ever before. For those engaged in critical Internet studies and critical studies of media and society, the “Arab Spring;” the ongoing Occupy Movement; and corresponding global, mediated networks pose deeply challenging questions about the role of social media in activism, political change, and/or revolution. To what extent does technology shape the social—perhaps most helpfully understood as “soft determinism”<sup>7</sup>—and to what extent do we as agents (individually or collectively) shape technology? How do we most productively study this relationship within the context of radically changing media landscapes of the “mediapolis,” the spaces in which media and people co-exist and mutually define one another? How do social-media practices redefine fundamental conceptions of “politics” and reflect radical interventions in the “police order”?

## DEFINING PROPAGANDA AFTER SEPTEMBER 2001

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The impact of the convergence of mass media and propaganda techniques on public opinion has long been observed by scholars. Herman & Chomsky (1988), for example, argue that the mass media serve as a structure for communicating messages and symbols to the general population in order to manipulate attitudes and elicit consent to social, political, and economic moves. For the mass media to evoke particular kinds of emotions in the general population to secure acquiescence in times of war, Jacques Ellul (1964) points out that

Propaganda must become as natural as air or food. It must proceed by psychological inhibition and the least possible shock. The individual is then able to declare in all honesty that no such thing as propaganda exists. In fact, he has been so absorbed by it that he is literally no longer able to see the truth. (p. 366)

In a world with a growing concentration of wealth and conflicts of class interest, the mass media's role increasingly incorporates systematic propaganda. With the development of information communications technology, propaganda now flows through virtual environments.

This complexity arises from the fact that we now have a vast and diverse media landscape across multiple digital, web-based, and mobile platforms and P2P modes of communication. There are 6.8 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions. 600 million people access Facebook through their mobile devices—Facebook's one billion users would constitute the world's third largest country. YouTube has more than one billion unique users each month. The exponential rise of citizen journalism, Twitter, and YouTube is a game-changer that renders Pentagon's efforts to control of propaganda, for example, a challenge to political, military and corporate interests. Studies of propaganda ideally take into account both the unique historical conditions and the dynamic landscape of mediated realities and everyday social media practices that are inextricably meshed with globalized information economies.

Contemporary scholars are now seeking new frames of reference to make sense of these evolving horizons. For studies of media and war, this "new world order" is constituted in part by what scholars have termed the "mediatization of war."<sup>8</sup> On one end of a continuum in contemporary research on news and propaganda, scholars are calling for an overhaul of approaches to propaganda analysis. The requirement of new theoretical frameworks arises primarily from this radically shifting media landscape and its increasingly close connections with war propaganda as evidenced after 9/11. As Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010) write in *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*, "It is in the new media ecology that established theories and assumptions about audiences, propaganda, and warfare are, at the very least, significantly challenged" (p. 2).

What remains similar is the basic form of propaganda; the rhetorical debates about the function of media for a democracy; the role of ownership and advertising as a news agenda setter. What has changed are the terms and basic sensibilities regarding deception, secrecy, and propaganda, to the extent that all information is in a sense read as propaganda in an era of information warfare defined by a radical erosion of privacy and increased surveillance—in short, “truthiness” as the foundation within information wars. Yet despite the need for new accounts and theoretical frameworks, our research, as well as that of many scholars in this publication, evidences that some modalities of propaganda in times of war take fairly predictable forms in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

For instance, Ellul (1965) argues that propaganda is necessary for governmental control because coercion is insufficient for creating the necessary acquiescent populace. He explains that all propaganda is “necessarily false when it speaks of values, of truth, of good, of justice, of happiness—and when it interprets and colors facts and imputes meaning to them” (p. 30). In addition to using cultural values and myths, then, propaganda defines the very meanings and understandings of “truth,” “good,” and “justice.” Reflecting truthiness in action, examples of this kind of redefinition of the terms of truth, especially in war propaganda, are plentiful. Indeed, the propaganda in the instance of post-9/11 was entirely inseparable from patriotism that, because of the president’s “decider” role, was also grounded in faith and not rational deliberation.

By 2003, the Bush administration’s threatened invasion of Iraq on the pretext of “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD) and falsely produced associations of Al Qaeda to Saddam Hussein was pushed forward by means of the classic propaganda strategy of identifying a “clear enemy” and fanning flames or terrorist fears built significantly on racial demonization and Islamophobia. The disinformation about the presence of uranium in Iraq, Saddam Hussein’s supposed intentions to build “weapons of mass destruction,” and his alleged “support of terrorism” including Al Qaeda (Bush, 2002) were founded on key elements of propaganda noted by Harold Lasswell in 1927 and many others since. Lasswell (1927) writes, “So great are the psychological resistances to war in modern nations that every war must appear to be a war of defense against a menacing, murderous aggressor. There must be no ambiguity about who the public is to hate” (p. 47).

Public dissent was kept from being broadly disseminated through any major U.S. news networks, cable, TV, radio, and print news. As a result of governmental and state-sanctioned invocations of patriotism, overt censorship, and firings of individuals who dissented, those who did have reason to question the propaganda were made to fear for their jobs, livelihood, and reputations reminiscent of the McCarthyism of the Cold War. The extent of silencing journalists is represented in the “muzzling” of Christiane Amanpour of CNN.<sup>9</sup> During an interview with Tina Brown on CNBC, Amanpour remarks, “Some officials responded angrily to allegations of ‘propaganda’ and ‘spin’ where instances of false reporting occurred, insisting that such were the types of mistakes typically made in ‘the fog of war’. Others blamed ‘overenthusiastic

reporters’ ” (in Allan & Zelizer, 2004, p. 8). Those who worked behind the scenes were also silenced:

I... was talking to a girl who was working for Fox and just before she was going to Iraq and I was like “so do you think the war is about oil?” She was like “oh, we all know it’s for oil but we’re not allowed to say that or we’d lose our jobs.” That kept me up all night because here people are not telling the truth, even though it’s their job to report news because they’re afraid purely for their own economic position.<sup>10</sup>

The systematic erasure, stifling, and refashioning of truths of war connects to the structural factors that form the base of the propaganda model developed in Herman and Chomsky’s 1988 book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*,<sup>11</sup> which holds that structural influences such as ownership, funding, and sourcing filtered out dissenting voices and created “systemic biases.”<sup>12</sup> They refer to ownership and control, funding-by-advertising, the media’s routine reliance on “official sources” in government and business, flak (the ability to mobilize large-scale complaints about news), system-supportive talking heads (the experts who confirm the “official slant”), and the ability to fix society’s “basic principles and ideologies.”<sup>13</sup> These filters are controlled by the same “powerful societal interests”<sup>14</sup> which finance and control the mass media. The filters fix the premises of public discourse, or what the public is allowed to “see, hear and think about.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, powerful private and public interests can control the parameters of debate.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the lockstep patriotism that silenced dissent in the United States after September 11, widespread skepticism reveals this period as a key shift toward a crisis of faith in both media and politicians, marking a watershed moment in the history of news media leading well into the years ensuing (Boler 2008; 2006). With trust in media and politicians increasingly shattered, the media were becoming more widely perceived as “all being propaganda” (see for e.g., Allan & Zelizer, 2004). As international communities witnessed the persistent fabrication of facts regarding WMD and manufactured myths linking Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda, the machinery of propaganda was becoming more widely questioned.<sup>17</sup>

## CHALLENGING THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM: FAKE IS THE MOST TRUSTED NEWS

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A form of dissent that saw meteoric rise in popularity during this decade is satire, and specifically “fake news” such as *The Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report*. Without question, popular fake news in the United States sees news media as propaganda. The critiques leveled by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, for instance, persistently challenged

the absurdity of news coverage as well as the absurdity and lies of politicians. Within the North American climate of muzzling dissent and outright lying to the public by media and politicians, the likes of Stewart and Colbert were protected both by their popularity, by the laws protecting parody in the United States, and the insurance held by a large corporate mogul like Comedy Central. In this capacity, these two court jesters were afforded cover to speak truth to power. Although there are many examples, forms, and modalities of dissent, to keep faithful to our thesis of truthiness it is worth highlighting satire's capacity to critique and call out propaganda.

Indeed, the rise and mass appeal of fake news has fueled popular and scholarly debate about the role of satire in politics. As Courtney Martin wrote in 2007, satire "has a long and proven history as the source of bona fide social change. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* . . . George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, all of these led to new public awareness that then led to protest, even some pragmatic reforms . . . Rebels distributed copies of *Animal Farm*—a novella satirizing totalitarianism—to displaced Soviets in the Ukraine right after World War II." Dismissals of the politically trenchant critiques of satire as ineffectual, or concerns that *The Daily Show* is "bad for American citizenry" are, at best, reductive and too simple. Not only have these "fake" news shows provided reality checks, counterpublic communities, and the mass mobilization of 400,000 fans to gather in Washington DC in 2010 for the Rally to Restore Sanity, they often "do a better job of news coverage than 'real' news," as viewers say time and again.

For many of the new generation of skeptic news consumers, satire and parody offers greater sense of certainty and trust than presentation of news that does not create this "embedded" or "assumed" critical distance. A primary mode of critique is to edit news archives to juxtapose a politician's words used on one date and then a contradiction captured on another date. This form of calling out lies is especially potent and effective as we know from the documented power of visual evidence. Colbert's show has the protection of the double-entendre of his "parody squared." Not only does his persona draw attention to the constructed and strange nature of news, but he delivers all his critique of extreme conservatism "backward," as it were, from the point of view of an extremely conservative pundit quite directly based on the all-too-real Bill O'Reilly of Fox news.

Stephen Colbert's 2006 White House Press Correspondents' Dinner speech provides a high-profile example of the explosion of dissent, building on the courage of bloggers, citizen journalists, and thousands of others who had already actively engaged digital communication technologies. Colbert drove to the core of truthiness and its biting, implicit critique of propaganda:

Do you know you have more nerve endings in your gut than you have in your head? You can look it up. I know some of you are going to say "I did look it up, and that's not true." That's 'cause you looked it up in a book. Next time, look it up in your gut. I did. My gut tells me that's how our nervous system works. Every night on my show, the Colbert Report, I speak straight from the gut, OK? I give people the truth, unfiltered by rational argument. I call it the "No Fact Zone." Fox News, I hold a copyright on that term . . . And as excited as I am to be here with the President, I am appalled to be

surrounded by the liberal media that is destroying America, with the exception of Fox News. Fox News gives you both sides of every story: the President's side, and the Vice President's side.

Colbert then skewered the Bush administration and media for producing new versions of reality before firing a scathing critique at journalists' failure to exercise objectivity:

Over the last five years you people were so good, over tax cuts, WMD intelligence, the effect of global warming. We Americans didn't want to know, and you had the courtesy not to try to find out. Those were good times, as far as we knew... But, listen, let's review the rules. Here's how it works. The President makes decisions. He's the decider. The press secretary announces those decisions, and you people of the press type those decisions down. Make, announce, type. Just put 'em through a spell check and go home. Get to know your family again. Make love to your wife. Write that novel you got kicking around in your head. You know, the one about the intrepid Washington reporter with the courage to stand up to the administration? You know, fiction!

This spectacle of dissent reflects the multifaceted complexities of twenty-first-century propaganda. One of the brilliances of Colbert's finely honed speech is that it touches subtly on every aspect of our distorted brave new world order. For instance, Gray, Jones, and Thompson (2009) observe that the *Colbert Report* recognizes news as representation rather than as reality. And by contesting the practices and values that operate within traditional information-industry landscapes, it functions as both a critique of the press and a site for media-literacy education. On a similar note, Meddaugh (2010) claims that the *Report* offers an alternative language to the "monolithic discourses" of the traditional news, becoming a "kind of 'fifth estate.'" She goes on to say that "Colbert as carnival challenges authoritative claims to the 'center' of discourse" (386–387). Emphasizing the shifts on what counts as truth within corporate-media frameworks, Jones and Baym (2010) argue that Stewart and Colbert consistently challenge the Right's "sleight of hand." By juxtaposing what the Right is saying with evidence available in the public record, Stewart is able to critique what Fox seeks to present as truth. Colbert goes even further by "not only parodying the lunacy, bombast, and irrationality of some of the far-right's most important voices, but also critiquing the broader political culture that supports such thinking" (286).

However, evaluations of the effectiveness or effect of satire as political messaging has also occupied scholars and popular cultural debates during the period of the rise of fake news popularity. In early 2007, MSNBC's Joe Scarborough ran a piece featuring *Daily Show* clips and two pundits debating whether "therapeutic irony is rendering us politically impotent" (Boyer, 2007). Similar fears were fanned in 2006 when news media had a feast with a questionable study by two academics which claimed that watching *The Daily Show* breeds cynicism and lowers young voters' "trust in national leaders" (Baumgartner and Morris, 2006).

In September 2006, *The New York Times Magazine* ran a savvy piece called "My Satirical Self" about a generation of satire in which Mason describes how "ridicule

provides a remedy for his rage.” In 2003, in an interview with Bill Moyers, Moyers asks Jon Stewart: “I do not know whether you are practicing an old form of parody and satire or a new form of journalism.” Stewart replies: “Well then that either speaks to the sad state of comedy or the sad state of news. I can’t figure out which one. I think, honestly, we’re practicing a new form of desperation” (PBS, 2003). These comedians may claim to be only interested in laughs, but those who watch, think critically, and take numerous forms of action do come away each night with renewed political convictions—not least of which is to question a news media that too often fails in its responsibility. One may still worry that even considered as a form of prepoliticization, the invitation to laugh our way into doomsday is the more likely result.<sup>18</sup>

However, the evidence<sup>19</sup> is rolling in to the contrary.<sup>20</sup> The question is no longer a simple one of laughter versus action, or online versus offline. Similarly misleading is the headline and implication of Jennifer Earl’s (2007) *Washingtonpost.com* commentary, “Where have all the protests gone? Online.” Scholarship that implies that fake news discourages the young college-age demographic from engaging in electoral politics was heartily disproved by the 2010 *Rally to Restore Sanity*. By 2011, the world had witnessed the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street Movement unfold, leaving little doubt about the role of social media and globally-shared dissent within this generation of radically shifting political consciousness and capacity for mobilization. It becomes increasingly difficult to separate popular perception, mainstream media agenda setting, Washington electorate decisions, and the critical force of digital dissent, including satire.

## THE INTERNET’S ROLE IN POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND PROTEST

### Blogging, Viral Videos, Citizen Journalism, and Challenges to Freedom of Speech

Alongside the rising popularity of satire, the Internet began exploding with myriad expressions of dissent. *IndyMedia* was born with the Battle in Seattle. E-mail and listservs—prior to the rise of blogging in 2003—functioned to circulate dissent and mobilization against the World Trade Organization and then against the war on Afghanistan. Within the escalating crises of truth, traditional and broadcast news faced radical challenges, including eyewitness accounts in the form of weblogs from Iraq, the growth of *Al Jazeera* as a news source offering divergent perspective from other corporate-owned Western media, and other modes of citizen journalism. By 2006, *Time Magazine* named “YOU” as Person of the Year—“you” being the diverse populace producing “user-generated content.”

Even as early as 2001, the Internet provided leading alternative sources of news, and its uses in fact exceeded the consumption of broadcast television news

(Horrigan, 2006). In general, online news was less strictly defined by the government's official line, such that even online versions of the same story from one news source (say NBC or CNN) might provide quite different viewpoints. The mainstream media, as is historically its pattern during war, became less critical of the government and military actions and more prone to repeating propaganda both in the lead-up to and during the war (Knightley, 2003; Tumber & Palmer, 2004). This univocal mainstream media environment opened a space for other news providers ranging from foreign media such as the British press to bloggers, leading many Americans to turn to the Web for war news (Fox, Rainie, & Fallows, 2003; Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Because online news access was more widespread, Al Jazeera English was increasingly watched and read in the North and Western world, although it remains somewhat challenging to access in the United States and only recently started to be broadcast via cable in Canada. The response from many current events blogs to the information demand that arose as the United States decided to invade Iraq led some scholars to describe this period as the "first true Internet war" (Wall 2005, p. 153; Kurtz, 2003).

In early 2003, in the largest-ever international antiwar protest in recorded history, tens of millions around the globe took to the streets protesting the preemptive invasion of Iraq. Although September 2001 was a defining moment, so were the unprecedented mass international mobilizations of February 2003. What accounted for the shift from some of the most egregious propaganda orchestration to the internationally mobilized dissent of the largest-ever antiwar movement? The buildup to Bush's threatened invasion corresponded with wider access to the Internet, which not only allowed for alternative flows of content and perspectives but alternative means of organizing an international social movement. A search through Google images for "February 15, 2003 antiwar protest" currently yields 3,240,000 results. The impact of the collected images begins to hint at the phenomenal international presence of this movement, and how the resistance and protest was captured in this era through digital photography or photographs then digitized and uploaded onto millions of blogs and websites either at the time or subsequently.

The international protest highlighted the force of global interconnectivity and networked, coordinated international actions. The movement demonstrated the new capacities and reach of independent and multiple information and communication technologies, and the role these diverse media play in coordinating resistance. Such public acts of solidarity hold the capacity to change the framing and agenda setting of news media coverage on local, national, and global stages. These movements as collectives also have the power to demand accountability for how the media do or do not represent certain perspectives and/or spin voices of dissent—and, finally, they have the potential to change public and policy discourse. In this digitized environment, the tightly controlled operations that had characterized the first Persian Gulf War were no longer possible.

The "collective crowd wisdom" possible through communities of blogging became a primary method of maintaining accountability within propagandistic mediascapes.

Even blogs that “merely” comment may impact perception and policy through fact checking and reframing. Bloggers showed little deference for traditional media who “used to be priests on high dispensing their knowledge to the unwashed masses.” But now “we fact check the crap out of them. And if they’re lying, it’s going to come out,” stated one blogger.<sup>21</sup> Mainstream media, in the words of another blogger, are “watching their back[s] a little more because they know they’re going to get caught out if they do anything egregious.”

Blogging is also seen as playing an influential role within agenda setting and framing with many understanding this new access to public expression as the emergence of a renewed “town hall”: a public forum in which judgments and opinions are rigorously debated. In a specific instance of blogging leading to agenda-setting, bloggers’ attention to reports that the U.S. military had used illegal phosphorus weapons during the November 2004 siege of Fallujah, and on-the-ground reporting by blogger/journalist Dahr Jamail of Iraq Dispatches, pushed the story to prominence in *The Independent* (UK). The reports forced the Pentagon to admit that white phosphorus had in fact been used in Fallujah. “All the information came from bloggers, came from people doing things like finding government documents, finding instances where soldiers admitted in filed manuals that they used it and what it looked like, and that the call sign was Whiskey P,” said a blogger who helped investigate the story.

Bloggers have also described their work as participation in a conversation. : “I think the main value is it brings more voices to the table. Like by comparison to corporate media where they pretend that there’s maybe two sides to every argument, which is ridiculous.” A contributor to a prominent U.S. military blog explains, “I like to argue because it helps form my opinion. I’m not bound to any opinion, and arguing with smart people who disagree is the best way to find holes in your own argument.” This model of democracy involves engaged dialogue and a collective search for “truth.” As one interviewee said, blogging “allow[s] a level of citizen participation. You have a voice as well as a vote instead of just going and pulling a lever and being an anonymous number, you actually contribute something to the debate.”

However, one might argue that digital dissenters are also engaged in propaganda vis-à-vis creating and disseminating certain information and opinions that support a particular worldview. As one Left blogger we interviewed states of his attempts to educate and mobilize his readers, “I’m not just attempting to influence them while they’re online, I’m attempting to influence them for their entire lives.” Another digital dissent producer, who created one of the winning Bush in 30 Seconds videos for the 2004 Moveon.org contest prior to the Presidential election, explicitly described his video as using propaganda techniques. Titled “Polygraph,” the video uses visuals of a polygraph machine to measure Bush’s lies regarding WMD. The viewer watches the polygraph arm swinging wildly—measuring lies with ink on paper—as one hears Bush’s statements to the press such as “Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa; Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of Al Qaeda.”

In our interview with Polygraph creator Rich Garella, he elaborates what he called “his theory of communication”: “Instead of saying, you know, ‘Bush lied,’ and give people something that they can argue directly against or... accept or reject, we just said ‘let’s give them an arresting visual teamed with an arresting sound track that just creates this association in their mind between Bush and lying without exactly saying it explicitly.’” When asked to elaborate on the aesthetic and symbolic decisions he made in the video, Garella describes how “scientific authority” was carefully invoked for rhetorical/symbolic persuasion. “People have this reaction like science is trustworthy and technical things are trustworthy,” Garella continued, “and there’s an implication that scientific instruments are neutral collectors of evidence and give results that you can’t doubt... the little pens are like laying down little lines of ink that you can’t argue with. Now obviously... it doesn’t really say anything about what Bush is saying because Bush was never hooked up to any kind of machine and, you know, polygraphs don’t work very well anyway...” (Personal Interview with Garella, 2005). He laughingly notes the irony of having used an image that connotes scientific authority and veracity despite the fact that viewers would realize Bush was *not* in fact connected to a polygraph. However, his point was that he chose an “arresting visual” to appeal emotionally in propagandistic technique, the ethics of which he himself questions: “I view this ad really as... a kind of propaganda that I hope was effective but it’s not very defensible... it doesn’t construct a logical argument or anything like that and... when the same methods are used by people I disagree with to put across an underlying message that I think is untrue, it makes me angry.”

As a complement to blogging, leaked sources often came in the form of images easily captured by digital cameras and mobile-cell-phone technology of camera and video. The U.S. war and occupation of Iraq continued under the Bush administration was increasingly fraught with one scandal after another, reliably to do with new modes of leaked sources. One of the most explosive issues that came to light during the post-9/11 period was the scandal of Abu Ghraib. In 2004 when the images of torture of war prisoners were released by Joe Darby, a military soldier, propagandistic spin and framing could not rescue the military and the Pentagon from having adhered to a set of rules not under law or jurisdiction. Many were quick to recognize the media’s complicity with senior military officials and the White House as they tried to paint the scandal as the responsibility of a “few bad apples” or isolated incidents of “mistreatment” and “abuse” rather than a matter of widespread practices of torture and secrecy regarding military policies.

The Abu Ghraib photographs, as Andén-Papadopoulos (2008) points out, “laid bare, graphically and irreversibly, the contradiction between the superpower’s well-regarded self-image and the realities of its contempt for a population who it had ostensibly liberated” (p. 23). However, although digital technologies and access to the Internet provided the means and the space where views and evidence that ran counter to the official message could be collected and disseminated, those in power still held the reigns of shaping public opinion through manipulating truths. In *None Dare Call It Torture: Indexing and the Limits of Press Independence in the Abu Ghraib Scandal*, Bennett *et al* (2006b) examine how the corporate-owned news managed to maintain a frame on Abu Ghraib that

designated the matter as abuse rather than torture, presenting it as an aberration from normal behavior rather than a problem residing within sanctioned policies of the military chain of command.

This kind of spin extended to blatant censorship. At certain junctures, bloggers' freedom of speech was seriously contested and curtailed, sometimes even stopped altogether. For example, CNN ordered journalist Kevin Sites to stop posting material on his blog. They claimed that, "Covering a war for CNN... is a full-time job, so we asked Kevin to concentrate on that for the time being." Rather than attempting to restore their lost monopoly on gatekeeping, journalists could carve out a new role as critical guides to the multitude of sources and perspectives available to citizens" (Williams & Della Carpini, 2011, p. 301). As this example shows, during the era of censorship following 9/11, for journalists to exercise their free speech as individuals was no simple matter, and they risked severe penalization. Another turning point in the power attributed to blogging emerged in 2005 when the U.S. Army issued strict guidelines for military blogs followed by the release of tighter policies in 2007, which included recourse to "administrative, disciplinary, contractual, or criminal action" against service members who blogged without proper clearance (Shachtman, 2007). On occasion, military bloggers were simply silenced (Londoño, 2008).

Despite these challenges, blogging became a widespread mode of dissent from all sides of the political spectrum. However, also coming to the fore were heated debates that questioned the credentials and values of blogging, that is, whether blogging provided anything politically substantive. If one follows the lines of Jodi Dean's (2008) critique, this megamart model of democracy produces an "echo chamber"—a packaging of the handful of corporate (news) flavors into 57 million variations, most of which are not adding any new "facts" to the conversation. Another echo-chamber issue is the fear that readers merely gravitate to blogs that suit their pre-conceived political views and filter everything else out. One of the bloggers we interviewed describes "the kind of blogging where people are just reinforcing their prejudices and their ideologies and echoing each other, attacking the enemy." Still others disagree with this dismissal—some research shows that readers are more likely to encounter views from diverse political perspectives in the blogosphere than in the traditional print news.<sup>22</sup>

Many political theorists and scholars remain skeptical about the role of social media in participatory democracy, questioning or even discounting the significance of "micro-blogging," "citizen journalism," and other social media practices. Evgeny Morozov (2011) and Malcolm Gladwell (2010), for example, argue against the power of social media, critiquing "weak ties" between members. Morozov (2009) goes further and explores the practice of "slacktivism," a term that refers to "feel-good online activism" that has no useful socio-political effect. He claims that this mode of digital activism is the ideal form of activism for "lazy" individuals, giving them "the illusion of having a meaningful impact on the world without demanding anything more than joining a Facebook group" (para. 1). In her essay on communicative capitalism, Dean (2008) claims that "instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices

of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles undermines political opportunity and efficacy for most of the world's peoples" (p. 104). She asks, "Why is democracy not working" despite the proliferation of voices online? Her questions lead to a lament that such expressions are merely "so much noise" that translates into no significant social change.

## Whistle-blowing online: In search of "truth"

Yet another eruption that occurred during the post 9/11 information wars was the increasing visibility of online whistle-blowing websites. One prime example is the not-for-profit media organization WikiLeaks, which was officially launched in 2007, largely in reaction to the decline of the democratic functions of the mass media. Although membership is mostly anonymous, it was the "Robin Hood of Hacking," Julian Assange, who was propelled to center stage as the founder and public face of the group (Harrell, 2010). Similar to Colbert's assessment of the U.S. media during the post-9/11 period, WikiLeaks (2012a) concludes that the publishing media at a global level had become "less independent and far less willing to ask the hard questions of government, corporations, and other institutions." As a result, the organization established a new model of journalism with the primary task of disseminating information that calls governments, corporations, and institutions to account, and allows the public access to "otherwise unaccountable and secretive institutions." WikiLeaks aims to shine a light on the ethical implications of the actions of these institutions.

According to WikiLeaks, a vibrant and inquisitive media and the capacity for the public to scrutinize the political and economic machinations of its society would lead to reduced corruption and a stronger democratic structure. Founded on the principles of freedom of opinion and expression, WikiLeaks shares original documents with news stories, allowing other media organizations, independent bloggers, and the general public full access to this information in search of "truth." The organization opens up what Foucault (1972) would consider a "space for action" where dominant structures can be resisted through the acts of dissemination of information and ideas regardless of frontiers. In this capacity, WikiLeaks provides the stage for an explosion of forces where the struggle between dominant power and subordinated power becomes tangible.

Perhaps the most well-known leak released by the site is the U.S. military video Collateral Murder on April 5, 2010 (WikiLeaks, 2010). The brutal content of the clip triggered enormous public outcry. Shot from an Apache helicopter, the classified video dating back to 2007 depicts the indiscriminate murder of about a dozen civilians, including two Reuters cameramen, in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad. The U.S. military initially claimed that those who had been killed were anti-Iraqi forces or insurgents, despite the fact that, during the video, at 15:29, a soldier states after shooting children: "Well, it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle." And someone answers, "That's right" (M.S., 2010). It later came to light that all of the individuals on the ground had been innocent civilians. Writing for the *Atlantic*, James Fallows (2010) claims that, if taken at face value, the video "is the most damaging documentation of abuse since the Abu

Ghraib prison-torture photos.” After persistent demands by Reuters, the United States conducted an investigation into the incident, only to conclude that the soldiers engaged in the event had been acting in accordance with the law of armed conflict and “Rules of Engagement” (WikiLeaks, 2010).

In 2010, WikiLeaks released 391,832 secret documents on the invasion of Iraq, 77,000 classified Pentagon documents on the conflict in Afghanistan, and approximately 250,000 cables between the U.S. State Department and more than 270 diplomatic outposts worldwide (New York Times, 2012). WikiLeaks also began formal collaboration with five major newspapers, including the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, *El Pais*, *Der Spiegel*, and *Le Monde* (Keaten & Blackledge, 2010).<sup>23</sup> In May, 2010, Private Bradley Manning, a 24-year-old intelligence analyst with the U.S. Army, was arrested on suspicion of leaking classified material (more than 250,000 documents) to WikiLeaks in one of the largest leaks of classified material in U.S. history (Prentice & Faulconbridge, 2012). Manning has since been indicted on 22 additional counts relating to the leaks, including violations of Articles 92 and 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). He has also been charged with violating UCMJ Article 104 (Aiding the Enemy) which is a capital offence (Williams, 2012), setting a precedent for the treatment of whistle-blowers in the United States. February 23, 2013 marked Manning’s 1000th day in detention without trial.

Since its inception, WikiLeaks has faced both challenges and support.<sup>24</sup> Although the group has acted as a counter to U.S. propaganda war methods by disseminating ground truths about the nature of these wars, it has also suffered its share of setbacks. Given its release of evidence of U.S. war crimes, the range of manufactured realities used to justify wars instigated by the United States and its allies, and reams of information on governmental and corporate corruption on a global scale, it is easy to understand why WikiLeaks would be a target for erasure. For example, in January 2008, Bank Julius Baer filed a lawsuit against WikiLeaks, citing the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and accusing the organization of disseminating confidential financial information about offshore accounts. In February, a California judge ordered Dynadot, a domain-name registrar, to disconnect the WikiLeaks.org domain name from its server, preventing user access to a content-filled domain (BBC News, 2008). The injunction was dissolved, and the bank dropped its case by March.

In November 2010, in what might be perceived as a strategy to shut down the organization through suffocation of funding, WikiLeaks received a letter from the U.S. State Department that implied (but did not explicitly state) that illegal activity by WikiLeaks provided the grounds for action by financial-service providers. Consequently, PayPal blocked the group from using its services to collect monetary donations. This action was followed by other financial institutions such as Visa, MasterCard, and Bank of America (WikiLeaks, 2012b).

The New York Times (2012) points out that since sexual assault allegations were brought against Assange (allegations he has consistently denied), in 2010 WikiLeaks “foundered,” consequently entangling Assange in a prolonged extradition battle. Also in 2010, Interpol placed Assange on its most-wanted list. In February 2012, leaked e-mails

from Stratfor, a private intelligence corporation, showed that the U.S. Department of Justice had issued a secret, sealed indictment against Assange (CCR, 2012). And newly declassified documents reported that the U.S. Military had identified Assange and WikiLeaks as enemies of the United States (Dorling, 2012). At the time of writing, Ecuador has granted Assange diplomatic asylum.

WikiLeaks is accused of “threatening national security” because it counters governmental choices about what information should be publicly available and what information should be censored in the name of “security.” The controversies surrounding Assange and WikiLeaks may raise for some the question of when and whether all information dissemination can be considered propaganda. If propaganda is understood to refer to filters that fix the premises of public discourse and to perimeters set by powerful private and public agendas that determine what the public is allowed to “see, hear and think about,”<sup>25</sup> then it is important to consider the point at which information becomes propaganda.

However, propaganda should not be identified with “threats to national security.” Within an age of information warfare, certainly “raw information,” such as government-produced cables and documents, and so forth, can be used for propagandistic purposes, and, to the extent that Assange has a political agenda beyond freedom of information, one might assess *intentions* as propagandistic. It is equally important in an age of information warfare to consider carefully the fundamental importance of freedom of information and access to primary sources as a supplement to the myriad secondary sources and retellings that constitute journalism and blogs. Although dissenting figures such as Assange might be considered political because of their efforts to shape how people see and think, the “leaked” or “freed” information cannot in itself be identified as propaganda until one can trace how or if this information has been put to use as a technology of persuasion that then becomes, following Ellul, as invisible in its influence as the air we breathe.

## CONCLUSION

The deceptions regarding evidence of weapons of mass destruction spun by the Bush administration in concert with corporate-owned and traditional news during the buildup to the invasion of Iraq are now widely recognized as the most egregious examples of U.S. propaganda in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in terms of the production of blatant lies as part of a public foreign policy. “Information warfare,” “spinning” the facts, “creating” the facts, and “redefining reality” have become the province of those in power who hold authority over and access to dominant media.

In the current socio-political context, the media are so intimately connected with the process of warfare that “the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one accounts for the role of the media in it.” Such “mediatization” of war produces an “emergent set of unpredictable relationships amongst the trinity of government, military, and

publics.” The conflict across these horizons is “diffused war . . . immersed in and produced through a ‘new media ecology’” (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2010, pp. 6-7).

Investigative journalism is threatened with extinction by the demands of 24/7 news cycles that enforce an insatiable and rapid superficial production of “new” and “breaking,” with resources invested in inexpensive fluff and feature over serious in-depth investigations (Allan & Zelizer, 2004, p. 11). Within a media-saturated world, the notion of “spin” has become widely understood to describe almost all news. In a postmodern landscape of widely shared, skeptical relationships to what is presented as “true” and “real” new measures are used by different publics to assess the credibility of sources.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, the plague of skepticism toward politicians’ “facts” and media’s “fairness and accuracy” is in no way merely the concern of scholars but, rather, it is increasingly reflected in popular culture. Despite this skepticism, the proliferating use of social media and communication technologies for purposes of dissent from official government and/or corporate-interest propaganda offers genuine cause for hope. It is conceivable that with ongoing civic unrest, demands for new practices of participatory democracy and accountability will continue to redefine the mediascapes, countering truthiness with the redistribution of “the sensible” (Ranciere, 2006) alongside critical consciousness of propaganda. These competing voices, sources, and modes of communicating news are, more apparently than in any recent decade, modulating the agenda-setting power of the front pages of print news. However, whether increasing public access to the means and production of alternative accounts of reality that contextualize media and politicians will bring the world any closer to authentic participatory democracy remains to be seen.

## NOTES

1. For an analysis of “Truthinessology,” see recent July 9, 2012 *Washington Post* feature, “Truthinessology: The Stephen Colbert Effect Becomes an Obsession in Academia”; [[http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/truthinessology-the-stephen-colbert-effect-becomes-an-obsession-in-academia/2012/07/09/gJQAYgiHZW\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/truthinessology-the-stephen-colbert-effect-becomes-an-obsession-in-academia/2012/07/09/gJQAYgiHZW_story.html)]
2. The “reality check” for dis-reality production was provided in 2004 by journalist Ron Suskind’s renowned article in the *New York Times*:

The [Bush] aide said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

3. Writing about the press conference and book signing for U.N. Weapons Inspector Hans Blix in 2004, the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs includes a comment on the uniqueness of “truthtelling,” with a subhead on Hans Blix titled “A Profile in Courage”: “On

the eve of the anniversary of the war on Iraq, Hans Blix came to the United Nations for a press conference and a book signing—and the event was almost like a popular demonstration in his support. In half an hour some 300 people had bought *Disarming Iraq* and lined up for the former head of UNMOVIC to sign it. As they did so, U.N. staff, ambassadors and others expressed their appreciation of his integrity and honesty. Apparently, telling the truth in these days is rare enough to earn special recognition . . .” The final words from Blix’s book *Disarming Iraq* are especially relevant here: “In fact, a thread throughout the book is ‘the lack of critical thinking’ from the governments involved. In his book, Blix characterizes the Bush administration view as: “The witches exist: you are appointed to deal with these witches: testing whether there are witches is only a dilution of the witch hunt.’”; [<http://www.wrmea.org/archives/261-washington-report-archives-2000-2005/may-2004/5114-frustrated-neocons-former-un-weapons-head-blix-assess-year-of-war-on-iraq.html>]; Ian Williams, “Frustrated Neocons, Former U.N. Weapons Head Blix Assess Year of War on Iraq.” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (New York: United Nations, 2004), 30–31, 94.

4. For an essay that analyzes the forms of propaganda during this period, see, for example, Deepa Kumar, “Media, War, and Propaganda: Strategies of Information Management during the 2003 Iraq War.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 3(1): 2006.
5. However, infinite sources and accounts have also resulted in a dangerous proliferation and oversaturation and, ironically, a resulting narrowing of news consumption. In other words, more does not necessarily equal accuracy as viewers are known to read selectively what confirms preexisting beliefs. As well, the multiplication and fragmentation raises concerns about what may come to count as “common” or shared understandings of world events, arguably posing increasing challenges for informed and mobilized publics.
6. Aptly captured in a unique viral video remix titled “Keeping America Scared,” this pre-YouTube era video represents an early example of “amateurs” literally producing dissent through remix and posting it online. In this instance, the piece went immediately viral, crashing any servers on which the author tried to host it. Such access to digital media through web-based tools fermented new forms of dissent, and one that remains particularly powerful is the remix. In “Keeping America Scared,” the producer uses news footage from C-Span of officials’ own words (in this case, footage of Bush, Rumsfeld, Laura Bush, Cheney, and Giuliani, Schwarzenegger) to evidence their deceptions and/or blatant propaganda or lies.
7. See for example Feenberg, A. *Critical Theory of Technology* (2nd ed) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
8. Hoskins and O’Laughlin (2010) explain that this concept amplifies the ideas of information warfare that is now inextricably intertwined with actual military action.
9. [Amanpour] was asked to comment on assertions that Bush administration officials had intimidated journalists, not least into feeling unpatriotic if they gave voice to criticism or dissent. “I think the press was muzzled and I think the press self-muzzled. I’m sorry to say but certainly television and, perhaps, to a certain extent, my station [CNN] was intimidated by the administration and its foot-soldiers at Fox News. And it did, in fact, put a climate of fear and self-censorship . . .” When pressed about whether there were specific stories couldn’t be told, she replied, “It’s not a question of couldn’t do it, it’s a question of tone. It’s a question of being rigorous. It’s really a question of really asking the questions. All of the entire body politic in my view, whether it’s the administration, the intelligence, the journalists, whoever, did not ask enough questions, for instance, about weapons of mass destruction. I mean, it looks like this was disinformation at the highest levels” (in Allan & Zelizer, 2004: 8–9).

10. From interviews conducted during a three-year research project “Rethinking Media and Democracy,” conducted during 2005–2008, Principal Investigator Megan Boler (funded by the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council).
11. The book’s title was itself a reference to the phrase “manufacture of consent,” which was coined by the U.S. writer Walter Lippmann in his book, *Public Opinion*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1921).
12. E. S. Herman “The Propaganda Model Revisited,” *Monthly Review*, July-August, 1996.
13. E.S. Herman, & Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, Introduction, 1988).
14. *Ibid*, Introduction.
15. *Ibid*, Preface.
16. Criticisms of the Propaganda Model range from “highly elective . . . confusing . . . propaganda,” to Oliver Boyd Barrett who argued in 2004 that it was actually too weak on the “absoluteness of complicity in times of war,” O. Boyd-Barrett, “Understanding,” in Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (eds.), *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 25. However, the PM never claimed to predict the effect of the media on the audience. Instead, it offered a model for predicting media performance under certain conditions.
17. See also N. Wolf, “Fascist America in 10 Easy Steps.” *The Guardian*, April 24, 2007; [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/24/usa.comment>]
18. Martin (2007) claims that although laughing is inherently healing, especially in contemporary society, “like comfort food consumed night after night in place of broccoli, we are gorging ourselves on what feels good instead of processing what feels so bad—and doing something about it.”
19. In 2006, our survey of 160 producers evidences that 52 percent agree that, “My online political activity has caused me to take action in my local community (e.g., protest, boycott, etc.)” A majority, 59.5 percent, says, “My online participation in political forums has led me to join at least one political gathering or protest.” Since becoming active online, 29.3 percent are “more active in ‘offline’ political activities,” and 63.1 percent “spend about the same amount of time in ‘offline’ political activities.”
20. See the 2012 study funded by the MacArthur Foundation and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education (CIRCLE): J. Kahne, Lee, N., & Feezell, J. T. “Digital Media Literacy Education and online civic and political participation. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 2012:1–24.
21. All quotes from bloggers come from interviews conducted during Principal Investigator Megan Boler’s “Rethinking Media and Democracy” 2005–2008 research project, (funded by the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council).
22. See, for example, E. Lawrence, Sides, J., & Farrell, H. Self-segregation or deliberation? Blog readership, participation, and polarization in American politics.” *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 2010: 141–157.
23. WikiLeaks is no longer in collaboration with the *New York Times*, *the Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *El Pais*, and *Le Monde*. Current media partners include,—but are not limited to—OWNI (France), NDR/ARD (Germany), *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon), *L’Espresso* (Italy), *Al Masry Al Youm* (Egypt), *Rolling Stone* (United States), and *The Hindu* (India). (For a complete list of current media partners, see WikiLeaks. (2012a,b), *The Global Intelligence Files*; [[http://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/373982\\_re-ct-untangling-the-bizarre-cia-links-to-the-ground-zero.html](http://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/373982_re-ct-untangling-the-bizarre-cia-links-to-the-ground-zero.html)]
24. Also emerging from the search for truth and public scrutiny of government and corporate moves are grassroots coalitions that have been actively engaged in digital dissent,

organizing sustained actions through the dissemination of information via diverse digital modalities such as websites, forums, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube channels. For instance, groups such as *Free Assange* and *Support Julian Assange* have rallied both online and offline around Assange and the protection of WikiLeaks as an instrument for democratic expression. In efforts to uphold his basic human rights, others groups such as *Avaaz* and *Vets for Brad* have organized in support of Bradley Manning. These collectives have acted in solidarity to translate their thoughts and words into a form of “natality” (Arendt, 1958), a birthing into the digitized *polis*—the eruption of political action in the intersection of online and offline worlds.

25. E. S. Herman, & Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. (New York: Pantheon, 1988) preface.
26. Melissa Wall (2005) describes “postmodern news” with reference to Lyotard, Jameson, and Baudrillard signaling shifts in previously taken-for-granted doctrines about whose knowledge is legitimate and which voices control grand or master narratives and measures of authority.

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