The Mass Media, Politics, and Warfare

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Media, Society, and Knowledge

A medium is an entity that helps organize a relationship between two other entities. Via a medium, a relationship between parts of a system and/or a system and its environment is produced in order to enable the self-organization of the whole system. Etymologically, the term medium stems from the Latin *medius*, which means in the *middle*, or the *middle one*. Media have to do with mediation. Social media mediate the social relationships of human being. They are employed in social relationships of living, social actors.

Social structures can be found in all societal areas: in technology, ecology, economy, polity, and culture. *Tools* are means employed for reaching defined goals, *natural resources* organized by humans are necessary in order to reach these goals, and *property* enables the production of use values and the satisfaction of needs. *Decision power* is necessary in order to orient processes and achieve decision-based results; *definitions* (norms, values, knowledge) serve as means of reflection and assessment of concrete human existence. That is, in society we find technological, ecological, economic, political, and cultural structures that mediate the relationships of human beings and hence the reproduction of social systems. They are both medium and outcome of social actions; they constrain practice, but also enable practices that result in new structures and the differentiation of already existing ones (Fuchs 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Giddens 1984). Media can be found with different characteristics in all complex, self-organizing systems. The basic characteristics of social media are:

- Media store and fix social knowledge and simplify human action because due to their existence, certain foundations of actions don't have to be permanently (re)produced, but can be accomplished by making use of media. Media reduce the complexity of society. They are carriers of knowledge and a foundation of the spatial and temporal extension of social systems.
- Media enable the continuity of social reproduction over space and time; they result in a spatial and temporal distancing of social relationships without loss of continuity. But media also produce special modes of proximity and hence sublate distance by re-embedding spatio-temporally disembedded relationships.
- Media are a foundation of practice and enable a certain degree of mobility.
- Media mediate, organize, and coordinate social relationships, communication, knowledge management, production, cooperation, competition, domination, decision processes, the discursive establishment of norms and values, and the production and materialization of ideologies.
- Media connect actors, individuals, and groups.
- Special skills, rules, organizational forms, and norms are necessary for using media (media literacy). Media put forward certain forms of usage and exclude others.
- Media mediate and change human perception.
- Media are symbolic systems and referential systems (e.g., technologies refer to purposes, property refers to material possibilities and positions, power to decisions, and definitions to lifestyles and taste).
- Media have material-substantial and ideational aspects; for example, in computer-mediated communication (CMC), the technological distribution as well as the produced content are important.

- Media make possible new experiences and ways of experience that transcend the immediate experience of corporeal presence.
- Media dissolve on the one hand temporalities and spaces, but on the other hand also produce new spaces and temporalities.
- Media don't come into existence by chance, but in certain historical situations and due to certain social and cultural needs and interests. Media have their own history.
- Media are referring to objective reality, but these references are not simply reflections and mappings of reality, but also contain new meanings and contents. Media unite different contexts, for example different subjective value schemes in face-to-face communication or different cultural contexts in virtual discussion boards. Mediation means frequently that realities are disembedded from their context of production and re-embedded into new contexts, for example in the Internet; and in a film montage, elements that stem from different contexts can be embedded into a new context that contains new, emergent meanings that can't be found in one of the single elements.
- Media employ principles of order; for example, linearity is a principle of order of the book, networking and linking are order principles of hypertext, and precision is one of the principles of the medium of money.
- Media contain certain meanings, ideologies, myths, and worldviews.

In modern capitalistic society, media play a particular role. The development of technological media has been advanced in order to organize economic production more efficiently. Capital accumulation is a driving power of the development of new technological media. As the scope of technological media (railway, telegraph, public transport, mass transport, telephone, radio, automobile, airplane, TV, fax, computer, and so on) expands, the flexibility of social relationship increases. Economic and military interests are present in the genesis of technology; the globalization of capitalism is medium and outcome of the development of new technological media. Anthony Giddens (1985) has shown that the emergence and expansion of capitalism are connected to the emergence and development of means of surveillance controlled by the nation-state (Fuchs 2003b). These are means of organization (census, statistics, public records, and so on) and means of discipline that allow political control of citizens. The development of modern media is connected to political and ideological interests. Military interests play an important role because the enforcement of certain political interests is based on efficient military technologies.

During the Fordist mode of development that was based on mass production and mass consumption, the mass media emerged as a relatively autonomous and functionally differentiated subsystem of society. The beginnings can be found earlier with the establishment of the press; radio, film, and television have propelled the development of the system of the mass media. In this system, ideologies are produced and distributed, and it is a diffusion channel of knowledge, news, ideologies, and views. The mass media form a self-organizing system that is organized around the permanent production of topical news about the state of the world. The mass media don't map objective reality exactly, but construct social realities that distort objective reality due to the subjective views, interests, and complex relationships that are contained in this system. The system of the mass media produces imaginary representations of reality: it doesn't simply construct one of many legitimate realities, as claimed by the constructivist sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1996), but rather produces and distributes various views of objective reality that are different from reality as such to certain degrees. This system can be considered a subsystem of the cultural subsystem of society. Mass media are organized around certain technological media (printing press, radio technology, television, computer, and so on) that are embedded into social institutions.

Hence, the term “mass media” doesn’t simply denote certain technologies, but also social relationships that make use of technological media in order to organize themselves and to reach certain goals.

The mass media are closely structurally coupled with the economic, political, and technological subsystems of society; they can achieve their goals only by making use of technological, economic, political, and cultural media. Institutions of the mass media frequently (and especially within deregulated social and institutional settings) also pursue economic interests and make use of technological media in order to achieve these aims; that is, they sell knowledge and news as commodities. The commodification of symbolic forms aims at capital accumulation in both a direct and an indirect way. In a direct way, information commodities are sold on the market; the indirect way is constituted by the sale of advertising space (advertisement in television, banner commercials in the Internet). Due to the emergence of the new electronic media that are based on computer technology, new forms and ways of capital accumulation such as digital pay-per-view television and online shopping have emerged.

We should employ the term “mass media” because technologies are used in order to reach a large number of people. Audience ratings are an important economic aspect of the mass media. A central characteristic of the existing organization of the mass media is that the main contents are controlled and produced by a relatively small number of people and groups, whereas the number of recipients is much larger. It no longer makes sense to distinguish subsystems of the mass media such as printed media, film, radio, and TV because of the convergence of technologies and media institutions. Due to digitization and technological networks, it is possible to digitally unite several classical media. Such a combination of text, audio, images, video, music, communication, and body enables a multimodal dimension of the mass media. The Internet as a new technological medium is a typical expression of the convergence of technological media. Media organizations make use of technological convergence in order to expand the scope and distribution of their contents. In institutional convergence, one can find a convergence of different markets and institutions. Monopolization is an important aspect of the mass media. Media corporations engage in both horizontal and vertical integration, they try to monopolize existing areas of specialization, but they also try to settle down and expand their influence in other areas of mass media. They aim at both selling content (film, music, videos, books, TV programs, and so on) and acting as providers and distributors (media megastores, TV channels, cinemas, and so on). The production and distribution of media contents are converging. The system of the mass media is technologically multidimensional (multimedia), but institutionally there is an increasing lack of plurality; it is controlled by a few large global players that engage in such different areas as software, Internet, film, broadcasting, music, and other media at the same time. The mass media are dominated by a few, large transnational corporations (AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Bertelsmann, Murdoch, AT&T, Sony, Seagram, and others). The largest one has been Time Warner Inc., which was been a result of the fusion of Time and Warner in 1989 and of Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting in 1996. In 2000 AOL, the largest Internet provider, merged with Time Warner, the largest media and entertainment corporation, in order to create AOL Time Warner. The system of the mass media is coined by capitalist interests and to a certain extent pursues economic goals. Hence, Dieter Prokop (2002) speaks of “media capitalism”; the media world market would be an oligopoly.

The example of multimedia corporations shows that social media don’t operate fully separated from each other. Human beings make permanent use of different media (also at the same time) in order to organize their daily lives and to reach certain goals. Technologies, organized natural resources, property, decision power, and definitions don’t exist fully autonomous from each other, but rather as a totality constitute the structural characteristics of all social systems. In order to exist, the human being must make use of different media:

technological ones (language, text, computer, and so on), cultural ones (norms, values, knowledge), economic ones (goods, money, and so on), and political ones (laws, elections, rules, and so on). The system of the mass media embeds technological media institutionally, but it is also based on economic, political, and cultural media. Its aim is the production and distribution of knowledge and topical news that frequently take on ideological and economic forms and are coined by economic, political, and ideological interests.

Politics and the Mass Media

The borders between media, politics, and economy are increasingly diffusing and becoming blurred today. Polity is increasingly organized around a logic that corresponds to the economy and the mass media. Modern democracies have emerged in coevolution with the modern economy; the two systems have never been independent. Hence, the principle of competition is not only an economic, but also a political principle. Decision processes have a competitive character in modern society, but the degree of competition has thus far been low concerning the mode of presentation of political issues. Due to the rising importance of the mass media, this area of polity is increasingly influenced by the economic logic of the media industry. This economization and mass-mediazation of politics results in several tendencies (Fuchs & Hofkirchner 2003). The first four principles stem from Dieter Prokop (2002); I have added the latter three.

- *Staging*: Politics is today frequently a staging without issues (issueless politics); concrete political actions and political programs have become rather unimportant issues. Politics is confronted with the exertion of pressure for staging, and it answers with self-staging. Personal competence in staging and entertainment is today one of the most important qualities of a good politician. Politicians are associated with certain images, and these images are created by the media and marketing experts. Advertisement, communication, and PR experts—so-called spin doctors—actively plan the appearance, strategies, and images of politicians.
- *Personified Politics Instead of Party Politics*: We are witnessing a change of the role of political parties, which define and present themselves via leadership figures staged in the mass media. Long-term strategies are no longer of much interest for the mass media, resulting in a loss of the importance of parties in politics.
- *Pressure Exerted by Topicality*: The political process time is much longer than the one of the media, because news is of value only for a very short time in the media business. Political parties orient their policy on media time; hence they are oriented on short-term political strategies. The mass media present politics to the viewers as a fast-moving flux that doesn't include more permanent processes, but constitutes itself as a fast juxtaposition of relatively independent singular events and topics that will be forgotten after a short time.
- *Political Events*: Politics gains an event character, and contacts between politicians and citizens are staged and organized as important mass events (e.g., party congresses). Political coverage in the mass media is organized around such events. Party congresses are used for the self-staging of political leaders and for attracting public attention.
- *Political Coverage in the Mass Media*: Political coverage is increasingly based on the simplification of complex political processes; on visualization, personification, short reports, statements, and articles; and on enlargement of the degree of entertainment by integrating "light," unambitious topics, dramatizing, scandalizing, problematization of the unproblematic, emotionalizing, concentration on single examples and private persons, conflicts, scandals, celebrities, and surprise effects. There is a tendency that ambitious, demanding, , substantial contents are substituted by commerce, sex, and scandals. The

political is frequently marginalized and extremely simplified by the mass media. Visual images dominate texts and words. Jean Baudrillard (1983), in this context, speaks of simulation, the substitution of the real by the fictitious resulting in self-referential sign systems that don't have fixed, but flexible, contents and meanings. Images are made up of iconographic signs that directly resemble the represented object. This is not the case with symbolic signs, which make up written and spoken language. Hence the video images presented by the mass media seem to be directly insightful, although they frequently don't represent reality. A difference between essence and mediated appearance of reality shows up that can't be recognized easily. There is a false appearance of authenticity and immediacy. Politics is presented as a fast sequence of images, symbols, and pseudo-events by the mass media. The concentration on fast sequences of images and statements results in a tendency of anti-intellectualism. Bad journalism is based on a positivistic practice that discards critical thinking. Tactics employed include the *concentration on facts* (external contexts, backgrounds, and larger coherence are ignored), *limitation to the methodical* (concentration on the search for evidence on certain assertions; the usefulness and meaningfulness of the employed strategies and the contents aren't reflected), *demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness* (harmful and dangerous processes are presented as harmless; the meaning of the harmful is not questioned), and *classificatory thinking* (certain social affairs are presented as self-evident although they are not; there is a lack of differentiation; existing orders are described and classified, but not questioned; existing phenomena are presented as being without alternatives; and possible alternatives are discarded). Another methodological process one can find is *decontextualization*: images from certain contexts are embedded into other contexts without taking over the whole contextual information; a new mosaic that consists of different images and descriptions is created, characterized by a lack of contextual information. New meanings emerge from and are produced by this mosaic of disconnected pieces of information. Due to the interlinked, decontextualized, fast-flowing character of information that is transmitted by the mass media, it is sometimes hard to judge whether or not meanings correspond to factual reality. The principle of *emergent meaning* is very important in modern mass media: a media report is more than the sum of its elements; it has symbolic and emergent contents, and puts forward certain implications indirectly. Frequently, meanings are not articulated and coded directly in the media, but *recoded* into other symbols.

- *Politics and Entertainment*: Politicians make use of entertainment strategies in order to enlarge their electorate. The entertainment industry to some extent makes use of political topics and figures (in films, TV serials, and so on) in order to increase their attractiveness. Politics can be a topic on the level of the characters, the characters' practices, or the employed topics (i.e. the issues and contents that the characters talk about).
- *Interactivity*: Political correspondence is increasingly employing interactive elements such as Internet discussion boards, live chats with politicians, and so on.

Examples: Media Coverage of the Gulf War

War coverage in the mass media is especially interesting for exemplifying some of the tendencies mentioned above because these are situations where the media are especially important for the public and are getting very large amounts of attention from both the public and political actors. I want to point out some aspects of coverage of the Iraq war in U.S. media in order to show that political interests and media coverage are interrelated. This coverage has, as I will try to show, sometimes been extremely one-sided, manipulative, and unbalanced; however, Americans don't seem to worry about media distortion and seem to be

satisfied with the coverage. On March 22–23, 87 percent of the interviewees in a CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup Poll said the media are doing a good or excellent job.

The war coverage of eleven important U.S. mass media institutions was observed from March 21 until April 3: CNN.com, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Post*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek* magazine, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Time* magazine, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *Washington Times*. The first two weeks of war seem to be of particular interest for observing new tendencies in war coverage. I concentrated on articles on war protests and the role of the media in order to find examples for the theoretical assumptions mentioned above.

In 1991, coverage of the attacks on Iraq was dominated by pictures broadcast by CNN that mainly showed Baghdad by night illuminated by flashes and radar images, as well as military analyses. Almost no dead bodies were shown; the media created the image that this was a clean, surgical war without civil casualties. For many observers, these pictures seemed realistic because they were broadcast live; the observers took what they saw as representing the reality of war. But the decisive question in war correspondence is not what is shown, but what is not shown, and it seems strange when there are no reports on casualties and the horrors of warfare. This war was the first hyperreal war: the images broadcast consisted mainly of simulated, fictitious, virtual reality detached from the real world of war. Media coverage changed the public perception of war; war became a media event that entertains people and that one can watch live on TV for twenty-four hours:

> The Gulf spectacle was "postmodern" in that, first, it was a media event that was experienced as a live occurrence for the whole global village. Second, it managed to blur the distinction between truth and reality in a triumph of the orchestrated image and spectacle. Third, the conflict exhibited a heightened merging of individuals and technology, previewing a new type of cyberwar that featured information technology and "smart weapons." (Best & Kellner 2001, 73)

The situation was a little bit different in 2003: the Internet as a new medium for alternative coverage was present, and there were websites where independent journalists and alternative agencies reported directly from Iraq. This can help in establishing a plurality of sources from which observers can choose and compare in order to create their own opinions. This time also, many European countries along with large media institutions opposed the war and hence provided alternative sources of information. Six hundred reporters were "embedded" with British and U.S. troops and reported directly from the front. All of these journalists had to sign an agreement that defines "ground rules" and set strict limits for coverage. The coverage directly from the front has further transformed the media coverage of warfare into a spectacle that excites and thrills the viewers—dead soldiers, dead civilians, and other horrifying effects of horror were not shown. One can question whether it makes sense to embed journalists and whether this results in a more balanced coverage. These journalists face all the dangers that the fighting soldiers are facing, and hence their reports might be distorted and might reflect their subjective fears and angers more than in traditional coverage. Can "embedded" journalists report independently and impartially on warfare they are involved in personally? Can they adequately maintain distance from their objects of coverage? Which stories are shown on TV, and which ones are missing? Do twenty-four-hour live coverage and reports directly from the front democratize and pluralize media coverage, or do they create yet a new dimension of hyperreality, media spectacles and simulated, false, one-dimensional realities? The reality of death and destruction might get lost amid the high-tech imagery delivered by the mass media. Was the embedding experiment really "a demonstration of democratic values and freedom of speech in action" (Katovsky & Carlson 2003, xix), or rather an integrative strategy of manipulation?

"When the American military goes to war, so does American journalism," said Marvin Kalb, fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard and

former CBS and NBC correspondent. “The American soldier is trained to accomplish his mission, and it’s a narrow mission. He has to take that hill, and so does journalism. It often has difficulty showing you the full terrain” (“With media in tow” 2003).

The Department of Defense *Embedment Manual* (Katovsky & Carlson 2003, 401–417) defined precise “ground rules” for embedded journalists and their coverage: it says, for example, that the media will be briefed in advance about what information is sensitive and “what the parameters are for covering this type of information”; after exposure to sensitive information, the media should be briefed “on what information they should avoid covering.” In instances where a unit commander decides that coverage of a story will involve extremely sensitive information, “The commander may offer access if the reporter agrees to a security review of their coverage.” If, in such a security review, sensitive or classified information is found, “The media will be asked to remove that information.” Another rule says that “embargoes [of certain media] may be imposed to protect operational security.” Embedding is an integrative strategy of dealing with the mass media that allows influencing coverage by close contact and precisely defined rules. The ground rules enabled the filtering of coverage.

Due to Vietnam experiences, the U.S. government in subsequent decades tried to keep the mass media out of the war zones and the invaded countries. This was, for example, the case in Grenada and Panama. Since the 1990s and starting with the Gulf War in 1991, a different strategy was employed, one that focuses on integration instead of repression. This shift is an expression of a larger ideological shift in society from “disciplinary society” to the “society of controls.” The disciplinary regime that dominated during the area of Fordism operated with the help of disciplines and disciplinary milieus. Disciplines are methods that secure the submission to external forces by surveillance and punishment (Foucault 1977). They are inherent in modern institutions such as schools, prisons, families, universities, hospitals, corporations, and so on because these milieus try to enclose the individual. Disciplines were also incorporated into the Fordist apparatuses of mass production, especially into assembly lines. These aspects still exist today to a certain extent, but concerning the disciplinary regime there is also a shift from the disciplinary society (Foucault 1977) to what Gilles Deleuze (1992) calls the society of control. Controls are internalized disciplines, forms of self-discipline that present themselves as liberating and operate in a more subtle manner:

> Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point. . . . The old monetary mole is the animal of the space of enclosure, but the serpent is that of the societies of control. We have passed from one animal to the other, from the mole to the serpent, in the system under which we live, but also in our manner of living and in our relations with others. The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network. . . . The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill. (Deleuze 1992, 4–5)

The mole as a symbol of disciplinary society is faceless and dumb, and monotonously digs his burrows; the snake is flexible and pluralistic. The repressive political strategy tried to discipline the mass media; the integrative strategy in addition tries to provide a certain degree of flexibility (such as embedding journalists), and freedom of movement that is kept within clearly defined limits. It tries to produce identity between the mass media and political strategies. This strategy is one of ideological integration. The ground rules were a discipline, but in many cases there was no need to apply them due to the ideological identity established by the practice of embedding that dissolves distance. This ideological shift can not only be observed in the mass media, but also in the area of production where strategies of participative management aim at the ideological integration of the workforce into corporations. Bonus systems, teamwork, share options, corporate identity, attractive design of the workplace, construction of a community between management and workers, advancement

of spirit of enterprise within the workforce, and so on are part of this strategy that constitutes new qualities of the disciplinary regime.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) Research Center (2003) concluded that "the overwhelming majority of the embedded stories studied, 94%, were primarily factual in nature." That the reports were to a large degree according to facts doesn't mean that they all told the entire truth about the war. Decisive questions that one would also have to cover in such a study are, Which facts are shown, which ones are not shown or omitted? Which language and symbols are used for describing both U.S. and Iraqi troops and people? Is the context of the shown pictures adequately presented? Which emergent meanings do the reports put forward? Are there indications that the reports can manipulate or influence public opinion into a certain direction? Do the embedded journalists have enough distance from prowar arguments, and are they able to keep such a distance from the action in their reporting? To which extents do the reports represent the subjective views and experiences of the embedded journalists? The PEJ study quantified a report as factual if it is not an analysis, opinion, or commentary, but this means that the decisive question of whether the reported "facts" represent or misrepresent reality wasn't researched. Facts were simply understood as those that are presented by the media as facts, not as coverage that corresponds to objective reality. The study doesn't take into account that one of the main aspects of information management in the media society is that facts and fiction, reality and simulation, essence and appearance are increasingly harder to distinguish. Another result of the PEJ study was that "while dramatic, the coverage is not graphic. Not a single story examined showed pictures of people being hit by fired weapons," indicating that the selection of the pictures is a decisive criterion for representing or misrepresenting reality. The extent to which the media can report the truth about the war can't be answered easily by researching whether certain selected pictures represent certain aspects of reality. Reality is multidimensional and interlinked. Especially complex sections of reality like war zones have a high degree of networked, interlinked, multidimensional causality and events. Media coverage always and necessarily reduces this complexity because it can't show all dimensions at the same time. But in order to represent reality adequately, it is necessary not to focus on single events, but to embed single reported events into larger contexts and dimensions. Hence, coverage should not focus on single events, but try to represent as much of the complexity of reality as possible. This is especially a problem for war correspondence because there are multiple limits of coverage. In short, media studies on war coverage should take into account how the various complex variables, aspects, and dimensions as well as how they interlink are represented in reports.

In 2003 there was no longer a CNN monopoly on war coverage, Murdoch's FOX TV heavily competed with CNN, and there were alternative press institutions that mainly made use of the Internet in order to provide alternative sources of war information. The competition for topical news and ratings between large channels such as Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, and MSNBC didn't automatically result in a more democratic and pluralistic type of coverage. Driven by the run for ratings, such competition can easily result in a media competition for who can present the war in the most sensationalistic and spectacular way. The result won't be the representation of alternative views, but mass one-dimensional coverage. The problem that alternative media are facing is that they are hardly recognized and hardly known, and that the war-waging parties try to control and influence information and war coverage. A study on two weeks of U.S. media prewar coverage concluded that the networks are megaphones for official views.

> Seventy-six percent of all sources were current or former officials, leaving little room for independent and grassroots views. Similarly, 75 percent of U.S. sources were current or former officials. At a time when 61 percent of U.S. respondents were telling pollsters that more time was needed for diplomacy and inspections, only 6 percent of U.S. sources on the four networks were skeptics regarding the need for war. Sources

> affiliated with anti-war activism were nearly non-existent. On the four networks combined, just three of 393 sources were identified as being affiliated with anti-war activism—less than 1 percent. Just one of 267 U.S. sources was affiliated with anti-war activism—less than half a percent. (FAIR, 2003)

When comparing media coverage of the first Gulf War in 1991 with war coverage in 2003, one sees that the sanitization of war has remained, but a new humane touch—an emotionalization—has entered. Embedded journalists show staged pictures of hard-working British and U.S. soldiers who risk their lives for liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein and helping them. Pictures of explosions are shown in order to present the alleged superiority of the allied forces, and so-called psy-ops (psychological operations) against the enemy are waged by making use of the mass media. War has become a spectacle media event—a twenty-four-hour live coverage, which is sold as a home entertainment commodity.

TV networks like CNN have established special filtering systems:

> A new CNN system of "script approval"—the iniquitous instruction to reporters that they have to send all their copy to anonymous officials in Atlanta to ensure it is suitably sanitized—suggests that the Pentagon and the Department of State have nothing to worry about. (Fisk 2003, 1)

The mass media make use of the blurring of the boundaries between truth and fiction, making it hard for the viewer to decide what is right or wrong, what corresponds to reality and what does not. "On September 7, 2002, Bush cited a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that he said proved that the Iraqis were on the brink of developing nuclear weapons. . . . Actually, no such report existed" (Rampton & Stauber 2003, 86). In autumn 2002, U.S. media reported that Iraq bought special aluminum tubes for its nuclear weapons program. In January 2003, the IAEA reported that the size of the tubes shows that they are not suited for uranium enrichment. Meanwhile, the speculations about the tubes had influenced the opinion of Congress members on voting for an authorization of war. A few weeks before the start of the war, Colin Powell announced that Saddam Hussein tried to buy nuclear material in Africa, and he presented a letter as evidence. Many observers, among them IAEA head Mohammed El Bardei, questioned the authenticity of this letter. In February 2003, Powell also presented other material purporting to show that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN sanctions. He included a report of the British MI6. However, this dossier wasn't an authentic work, nor was it accurate (Rampton & Stauber 2003, 96).

The main argument for justifying the war was that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. But no such weapons were found. This fact sheds critical light on the presented arguments. In his speech on the Interim Progress Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) on October 2, 2003, the head of the ISG David Kay admitted that "despite evidence of Saddam's continued ambition to acquire nuclear weapons, to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material." Instead of objective facts that could prove the existence of mass weapons, Kay presented purely subjective intentions as solid results of the survey: "Saddam, at least as judged by those scientists and other insiders who worked in his military-industrial programs, had not given up his aspirations and intentions to continue to acquire weapons of mass destruction." After resigning in January 2004, David Kay said, "My summary view, based on what I've seen, is we're very unlikely to find large stockpiles of weapons. . . . I don't think they exist" ("No evidence Iraq stockpiled WMDs" 2003). Being confronted with such hard facts, Colin Powell now argued that because Iraq *intended* to develop weapons, the invasion was justified.

Clearly, depending on government pronouncements and corporate media makes it hard to judge whether information corresponds to reality or not. Speculation often influences important decisions. When symbolic content plays an important role, as is the case in media

coverage, one is confronted with the fact that symbolic forms can be manipulated and fabricated in order to influence public opinion and to manufacture hegemony and consent. This is especially critical when such images play a decisive role in influencing political decisions and opinions. Critical examination of all alleged facts, critical awareness of the public, and permanent reflection of the contents presented by the mass media and politics seem to be the only ways for managing these complex situations. A pluralistic media landscape that reflects alternative standpoints, methods, and approaches is needed, but especially in times of warfare this is hard to achieve.

A U.S. media center was established in Qatar, and Western media coverage on the war in Iraq depended to a large extent on the information given from U.S. officials to the few hundred journalists present in Qatar. Three press conferences per day had been promised before the war began, but frequently none took place and gagging orders were issued. This shows that Western media coverage to a large degree depends on the information issued by U.S. officials, that censorship and disinformation are military tactics, and that war-waging parties try to influence the mass media in order to mobilize the global public opinion. Going to war also means staging propaganda warfare. The mass media line up frequently with their government on important issues because they are politically influenced and shaped by, and to a certain extent represent, the same economic and political interests as dominating groups.

One can report on events in a manner that tries to invoke positive or negative feelings of the readers; differentiated coverage tries to avoid strongly emotional articles that could influence the reader in one or the other direction. Negative feelings can be invoked by associating events or persons with phenomena or terms that are considered as dangerous, threatening, extreme, and menacing. This is especially true when media connote coverage about certain events with images of violence. Many examples for such an unbalanced, emotional coverage could be found in the coverage of U.S. media on the protests and demonstrations against the war in Iraq.

The *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Los Angeles Times* had varied in their coverage of antiwar protests, but exhibited several operating principles: concentration on violence and arrests, limitation to the methodical, classificatory thinking, decontextualization, emergent meanings, and recoding. Certain facts that have to do with violence are overemphasized, a simple picture of the protesters is put forward, and there is a lack of differentiation, complexity, and contextual information. There is a limitation to the method of reporting mainly on violence and arrests, the method concentrates on searching for evidence on such behavior, and the method itself is not critically reflected, that is, it is presented as self-evident. Pictures and images presented reality in a positivistic manner, and they were offered as self-explaining reality that doesn't need to be questioned and checked. Different categories and images create a new whole that contains new meanings that can't be found in any single piece or element. The possible invocation that antiwar protest = violence is such an emergent meaning. Frequently, certain acts of violence are presented as isolated facts, many such singular events are decontextualized and accumulated in one article, and a new meaning emerges. Dislike and negative feelings toward protestors are not coded directly, but recoded into images and descriptions of violence.

Stuart Hall (1980) has pointed out that the coding and decoding of the meaning of messages are shaped and influenced by discourses, that is, by knowledge from routines of technological infrastructure, relationships of knowledge production, and institutional frameworks. Coded messages would be significant, meaningful discourses. Subjective aspects that influence coding and decoding would be very important, and hence one couldn't assume an automatic identity of encoded and decoded meaning. In the examples just mentioned, there is information that contains meaning and gains significance by media discourses. There might be certain meanings that shall be decoded in certain intended ways, but there surely are different decoded meanings, that is, there is no absolute identity between coding and

decoding—some might see the media coverage as providing good information on the war, whereas others might consider it as highly manipulative. However, Hall mentions that there are dominant/hegemonic codes that try to ensure that recipients decode message in a certain intended manner. Employing emotional images of violence, disruption, arrests, and so on is a form of dominant encoding that makes use of the recipients' fears and emotions in order to increase the possibility that the forms of decoding and reading/interpreting a text remain strictly limited.

On March 26, many U.S. newspapers expressed relief that the antiwar protesters seemed to shift their strategy from mass demonstrations to smaller events and raising awareness for the relationship between economic interests and warfare. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "Protests shift to firms. Demonstrators scale back, focus on war's supporters." The *Chicago Tribune* had a headline: "Protesters to cool down a bit, seek to widen support"; and the *Washington Times* reported that "anti-war groups redirect energies." The *New York Times* reported on March 29 that protesters abandoned a plan to disrupt everyday life and "have shifted away from large-scale disruptive tactics and stepped up efforts to appeal to mainstream Americans" ("Antiwar Effort Emphasizes Civility over Confrontation," *New York Times*, March 29, 2003). In many newspapers, the focus of covering protests shifted from describing the protests as violent acts, or ignoring or downplaying them, to expressing that the demonstrations will exhaust themselves.

Many articles created the impression that the international antiwar protests were anti-American. For example, the *New York Times* reported on the first day of protests that American flags were burnt in Athens and that anti-American slogans were shouted ("Wave of Protests, from Europe to New York," *New York Times*, March 21, 2003). *USA Today* listed international protests against the war and described the protesters mainly in negative terms:

> Police clashed with 30,000 anti-war demonstrators Friday outside the U.S. Embassy in Yemen. . . . 10,000 people chanted anti-U.S. slogans. . . . Small groups of protesters hurling rocks and gasoline bombs at officers guarding the glass-and-marble U.S. Embassy. . . . Protesters on bicycles blocked Parliament Square." ("Anti-War Rallies March On," *USA Today*, March 22, 2003)

On March 31, *USA Today* reported protests in Egypt and Morocco, and concentrated on the burning of U.S. flags and on stones and bottles that were thrown. Arab protesters were portrayed by some media as aggressive, violent rioters. The *Chicago Tribune* wrote of "violent anti-American clashes involving tens of thousands" in Jordan ("Simmering Rage Threat to Regimes," March 24, 2003). The *Washington Post* reported that "anti-war protesters were out in force on the streets of cities across the Arab world again yesterday to vent their anger at the U.S.-led assault on Iraq" ("Marchers Object to Assault on Iraq," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2003). The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Arabs derived pleasure from watching U.S. POWs on Iraqi TV and Al-Jazeera:

> From the Arab League to the Arab street, television images of Iraqi resistance and American prisoners of war have drawn cheers. Pictures of four dead U.S. soldiers are circulating on the Internet under the words "About Time." Said a Cairo cabby: "The Iraqis are wonderful. I never dreamed they could do this." ("Arabs Take Pride in Iraqi Resistance," March 26, 2003)

Descriptions such as these can distort public opinion and mobilize the public against antiwar protests, and they also have racist implications. There is a concentration on certain facts, others are left out, and pieces of information are decontextualized and create new meanings for the reader. Many journals limit themselves to the method of finding evidence for violent behavior of protestors, and this method is not questioned or reflected. Violent images are presented as self-evident. The decontextualized description of acts of violence in Arab countries joins with terms that describe the events in a drastic way; a new meaning can emerge in the readers' mind, an emergent meaning that implies Arabs = bastards and hence

has racist implications. John Fiske (1996) stresses that social struggles that are organized around the lines of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and so on are reflected within and are part of the mass media. Social conflicts are slugged out in the media; conflicting discourses are represented by the media in certain ways. “Discourse . . . is always a terrain of struggle. . . . The dominant discourses, those that occupy the mainstream, serve dominant social interests, for they are products of the history that has secured their domination” (Fiske 1996, 5). In these examples, racial meanings are not spoken directly, but indirectly recoded into other discourses about warfare.

Coding and Content

The examples gathered in the conducted qualitative media observation study indicate that the mass media are prone to a type of political coverage that tends to distort and misrepresent reality. This is especially the case in tense political times. Making use of principles such as emotionalization, concentration on selective facts, limitation to the methodical, demonstrative harmlessness and inoffensiveness, classificatory thinking, decontextualization, emergent meaning, and recoding distinguishes manipulative coverage from high-qualitative coverage. The analyzed coverage on antiwar protests was frequently selective, emotional, unbalanced, misleading, deceptive, disorienting, and one-dimensional. Singular events were frequently decontextualized, overemphasized, and combined with other singular events, descriptions, and images in such a way that emergent meanings were produced that could easily be decoded by readers so that the coverage heavily influenced their views. Many articles were heavily recoded with connotative images of violence used to describe antiwar protests; hence, they must be considered as having a strong ideological, manipulative propaganda character. Certain facts were frequently overemphasized, whereas other, more decisive facts at the same time were dropped or underrepresented. One can conclude that many of the analyzed products “indoctrinate and manipulate” (Marcuse 1964, 12) and represent an “attack on transcendent, critical notions” (Marcuse 1964, 85) as well as a mainstream media universe of “one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are . . . repelled” (Marcuse 1964, 12). The mass media are not a neutral, fully autonomous subsystem of society; they are closely linked to both the political and economic system. They shape public opinion and are shaped by external social interests. Mass media are a territory of propaganda warfare; they compete for steering public opinion into certain directions. The mass media encode certain meanings, views, and ideologies into symbolic content; they make use of hegemonic codes in order to increase the possibility that the recipients will decode the content in intended ways. In times of heavy social struggles, hegemonic codes and strategies gain special importance. Due to the one-dimensional character of many war reports, alternative, independent media and information sources are very important for trying to compensate the imbalance of represented views and information.

In conclusion one can say that the relationship of media and warfare in the Iraq war 2003 can be characterized by a series of continuities and discontinuities that are characteristic for media coverage of warfare in the social formation of informational capitalism/media capitalism. Comparing the war in 2003 to the one in 1991 shows similar elements such as hyperreality, derealization, high-tech-warfare, presentation of high-tech by the media instead of the horrors of war, the mass media’s avoidance of showing and reporting about dead bodies, coverage as a global media spectacle. But one can also find new elements:

- *Internet*: war coverage making use of the Internet, interacticity, 24 h live coverage with the help of Internet streams, WarBlogs, alternative net media
- *End of Monopoly*: the CNN monopoly in war coverage has been ended by the rise of FOX TV, Al Jazeera and a European form of differentiated, balanced coverage

- *Embedded Journalists* as an expression of the transition towards the "society of control" that relies on an integrative form of ideology

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