"Everyone want big screen TV, but no one see big picture": How contemporary techniques emphasizing speed and image in television war reporting produce an illusion of objectivity

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Note: The quote in the title is from a caption for a sculpture by Renee Stout in 1994.

People who are skeptical of media influence on public opinion typically make two challenges, which can be expressed as the following questions. First: Why should we expect the media representations of war to influence viewers' opinions about war? Second: Why should we not expect both objective events and personal beliefs to be decisive in shaping opinions about a war? This chapter will attempt to answer those questions.

While the forms of influence discussed in the previous chapters are important, the way in which the television-viewing public learns about what is happening in a war has two effects. It makes audiences both less able to focus on objective events and less able to use their own beliefs as a guide in forming opinions. There are two tasks a person must perform in order to focus on objective events as well as base opinions upon ones own beliefs.

1. Filtering out important objective facts from less important ones.
2. Connecting what is shown to the viewer's personal worldview and critiquing what is shown on that basis.

Diverse writers including Baudrillard, Chomsky, Edelman, and Ellul have made the argument that today's media fail to provide viewers with context in the stories they present. This paper will discuss how the means used to create representations of war lead to representations of war which lack context. Because of this lack of context, those viewing the representation are less able to focus on important objective facts or think about what they are shown in relation to their own understanding of the world.

If context is absent, the audience is not told, and often does not know, the past causes or the future consequences of the event represented. Nor are people in the audience told of other events occurring in the present that are important in understanding the full significance of the event shown. We will now discuss why and how representations of armed conflict lack context and consider some examples. Along the way we will also consider how each of this lack of context leads to one or both of two problems. These problems are the undermining of the viewer's ability to focus on important facts and critique the representation.

There are many causes for this loss of context. We divide these causes into two groups, those related to an increased emphasis on images in reporting and those related to increased speed in reporting. This division is somewhat forced however since the reason for dependence on images has much to do with the effects of increased speed. We will first consider the significance of increased emphasis on images.

Emphasis on Image and the Loss of Context

Representations which resemble personal experience are subject to the limitations on understanding inherent in personal experience. The event that the viewer sees attracts attention to itself. In doing so, it also diverts attention away from events that the viewer does not see. Another event, even one highly relevant to the event shown, is likely to be given less weight, forgotten, or never even mentioned if it fails to make it on camera. This is because reporters and editors feel they must somehow connect what the report says with the images they have available to show.

How is it that the video camera, which could bring images back from almost anywhere in the world, is so limited in what it can show? To begin with, cameras are like people in that they can be in only one place at a time. For that reason alone, it is hard for a single camera, used over a short period, to show events from several different perspectives. In addition, the camera crews which operate these video cameras have, until very recently, been expensive (particularly where live reporting is involved) and thus few in number relative to the events which are newsworthy. Unless a TV news organization concentrates their resources to intensely cover a story, there will probably be only one camera crew assigned to that story. Editors expect that one camera crew to send back certain kinds of images. If there is a photo opportunity with a national leader or a battle, the camera crews will be there, and the reporters will talk about those things they show. Meanwhile, those camera crews will not be able at the same time to cover the critics of those leaders or the closed-door meetings far away from the battle that hold the best promise of ending the fighting. (Begleiter in DACOR 1991, 85) We discuss below why editors expect camera crews to provide such images.

A quick summary of that argument would go something like this: Time pressures imposed by the speed at which events (and the public's attention) move require reporters and editors to represent those events quickly. Because of this imperative, reporters and editors must stay within a prescribed lexicon of visual symbols that are instantly recognizable such as the protester, the politician, the soldier, and the refugee. If the news organizations fail to create and deliver representations quickly by making use of cliché, they risk several things happening which are bad for their ratings. First, they could take too long to describe the event, and have viewers grow bored and switch over to the competition. Second, the reporting may lag further behind events than the other networks' reporting, again possibly leading to viewers to switching channels. Third, if the news organization does not take adequate time to communicate what the representation is attempting to say, the news could confuse viewers. See the case of Chomsky on Nightline below. Networks act on the premise that viewers switch channels to select the representations of events being offered that cause them the least confusion or cognitive dissonance with what they already believe. (Bourdieu 1998)

Murray Edelman wrote about something similar happening in U.S. domestic politics where dramatization was at fault for the narrowing of the context provided in the news. This narrowing of context in turn excluded the information needed for a functional public discourse:

> There is a kind of Gresham's law of news prominence: dramatic incidents involving individuals in the limelight displace attention from the larger configurations that explain the incidents and much else as well. Whether a politician unethically leaked a story exposing the failure of a policy becomes more important than whether the story is accurate. Who favors and opposes a proposal and what tactics they deploy displaces attention from its consequences for [the people's] well being. . . . In every case a widening of the frame (in time, space, logic, and empirical links) within which an event is viewed would change its meaning but would also create an account typically categorized as research rather than news and often as dull rather than dramatic. (Edelman 1988, 102)

Aside from this focusing of attention, there is also a false impression of omniscience given by the news media. This comes from the bringing of images back

from far-away places viewers have never been and situations with which they have no personal experience. This false impression is reinforced by television news producers' own self-promotion, which makes claims similar to the following: "The Wall came down in Berlin and we were there. Chinese students demonstrated in Tienanmen Square and we were there. Bombs fell on Baghdad and we were there". This implies that the viewer will virtually be present at all important events anywhere thanks to the media. If the viewer keeps watching, that is. Such claims deceive the viewer into thinking they are free of parochialism and have the "Big Picture". The ironic humor of this paper's title comes from the idea that people wanting the "Big Picture" often instead substitute something that is easier to acquire.

To the extent that viewers accept the media's claim of having provided them the "Big Picture", viewers lose their ability to question the universal applicability of the experiences the media provide. Viewers impressed by seeing some events they could not have seen for themselves assume they are now seeing everything (or at least everything important) and no longer have to worry about being surprised by events in the world. Live video of an event, no matter how far away, crosses the distance to the viewer instantly, carrying with it an aura of reality that a description of the event in words or obviously edited video version lacks. This dims the viewer's awareness of things the network does not show. It follows from this that it dims awareness of complicated realities that are very difficult to communicate in visual shorthand of a few images. We will now consider some examples how uses of familiar yet dramatic imagery in representations of events hindered viewers' ability to discern important facts and use their own worldview to critique the representation of the event.

Example #1 of Images in Reporting: The Kwangju Revolt

In May 1980, following years of violent student protests against the government at universities around the country, there was an uprising in the city of Kwangju in South Korea. This protest grew generally out of frustration with the military dictatorship's imposition of marshal law when the people were hoping for democratization following the assassination of the dictator Park Chung Hee. The military leaders running the country had long discriminated against the region containing Kwangju, and democracy seemed like the best hope of resolving that problem. The uprising was also a response to Korean paratroopers purposefully killing many protesters days before by using indiscriminant machinegun fire and bayoneting protesters to break up a demonstration. In the uprising that followed, the thousands of protesters acquired weapons from an armory and drove the government forces out of the city. After a several day standoff where the U.S. refused to mediate between the two sides despite requests from the protesters, the U.S. government agreed to release some South Korean army troops from joint command to quell the uprising. The South Korean army killed between 200 and 2000 civilians as well as injured many more. (Larson 1990, 79)

The question Larson then asks is this. Why was there not more outcry by the U.S. media and public in favor of these pro-democracy protesters? Such outcry may well have led to the U.S. restraining the South Korean government more and pushing that government harder to democratize. One obvious answer is that South Korea's great strategic importance and close military ties to the U.S. were of the greatest salience to

elite opinion leaders. This, in turn led them to suppress their concern for the fate of the people of Kwangju and democracy in South Korea, and public opinion followed. Larson offers an alternative explanation however: the way in which the U.S. television networks covered the revolt suppressed the public's response.(*Ibid.*)

U.S. television coverage of Kwangju, lacked of discussion of why people there were in revolt. U.S. television coverage also used stereotypical visual symbols (visual shorthand) and micro-narrative form (where every story has to be self-contained). Stereotyped symbols and micro-narratives are very common in television news. At the time, the established visual stereotype of South Korean internal political conflict was that of the violent student protest where the students fight with riot police. For reporting on the comparatively common incidents of student protest, that stereotype may have been more appropriate. However, in the case of Kwangju, the use of the familiar symbol of protest to provide the visuals for the story masked the difference in scale of the violence going on then compared with the past. The visual shorthand for, "new development, a provincial city revolts for democracy", looked very similar to "another student protest in Seoul". Finally, it is important to note there was a language barrier between the American reporters and the people they were reporting on. This is a common barrier in international reporting. One reinforced reporters' tendency to follow the lead of U.S. government officials such as the U.S. Ambassador in interpreting what the event meant and how to cover it. (Larson 1990, 83)

It is important to note here that the coverage provided by CBS was less prone to do this than the other networks, even though Larson uses CBS coverage in his examples. Specifically, CBS did not adopt, as ABC and NBC did at some points, the South Korean government's and the U.S. Ambassador's preferred term "rioting" to describe events in Kwangju. CBS also devoted more screen time to the conflict. (Scott-Stokes and Lee 2000) The author's own viewing of tapes containing all three networks' reporting from Kwangju showed that CBS placed far more of the responsibility for the uprising on the military government of South Korea than did ABC or NBC. One NBC report by Jim Upshaw on May 22 during the uprising actually vilified the students and painted a picture of chaos in the city. CBS also went to greater lengths to tell and show viewers that the uprising was more than students with guns, and that large portions of the people in the town supported the uprising, if not continuing it to the point where the army would invade.

All three networks however failed to make clear the connection between the very large military presence the U.S. had in that country and the potential influence on the South Korean military government that presence offered. That influence could have been used to encourage a peaceful resolution to the uprising. That political leverage the U.S. had, and the responsibility that came with having it in that circumstance, is something difficult to communicate in images. The anger and suffering of the people of Kwangju could be communicated with less effort, so that is what was done. There are of course other possible explanations for why producers and reporters omitted this angle of the story. The need for drama and readily understood imagery is a highly plausible one however. It is plausible that U.S. reporters lacking a good understanding of what is going on would reach out for something familiar in the situation (such as student protests) to make it easier to grasp and present.

Baudrillard anticipated such an effect when he wrote about “the image that tests you”. In that phrase he was referring to the effect on a viewer’s perception of viewing images presented for very short periods, one after another, as television news is presented. Images that are shown only for a few seconds, immediately followed by another, do not permit analysis. (Baudrillard 1993, 63) A viewer can only react instinctively to such images. We will revisit Baudrillard’s point below when we focus on the speed of representations rather than their infatuation with images.

When a viewer may view a still image to view as long as they like, that viewer can (figuratively) interrogate the image. The viewer can ask themselves questions like:

- Why is this particular image presented and not another?
- Is something important missing in the understanding this image provides?
- Is someone trying to manipulate people’s reaction by showing it?
- Who stands to gain from most people’s typical reaction to it?
- Does something I believe about the world contradict what this picture seems to be saying?
- If so, is the picture misleading or is my contrary belief wrong?

This can only happen though if the viewer only has a moment to look at the image before it is replaced by the next, then the next, and so on, such reflection is impossible. There is simply no time to pose and think of an answer to such questions. The viewer only has time to form a reflexive or instinctive response. Such a response can only be a stereotypical one.

Some stereotypical emotional reactions involve the viewer taking on (or if the viewer dislikes the person on screen, taking on the opposite of) the apparent emotional state of the person on screen. Stereotypical intellectual responses would include assigning meaning to images based on the meaning of other images the current image resembles. The latter is the source of the confusion of revolt with student protest in reporting on South Korea. We will expand on this idea later when we discuss how people use techniques called heuristics when drawing conclusions based on limited information. MacKenzie Wark writes that the time pressure on the length of what can be said in reporting, and the need for "simple . . . interchangeable narrative constructions", is likely the mechanism by which this narrowing down to stereotypes in representations of other cultures occurs. (Wark 1994, 26-27)

There was a deceptive quality in the visual images used by the media in the Kwangju case. This deception arose from the missing information in the stripped-down vocabulary of symbols used in television news. A limited vocabulary like this could not accurately describe unexpected events such as the Kwangju revolt. This deception is possible because most viewers are unaware that the camera can lie by making the event it captures seem like something different from what it truly is. The techniques developed by television news producers to ‘efficiently’ inform the public of changing events made the audience less able to discern important facts about the situation (*ex.* that a pro-democracy revolt had taken place and the U.S. was in a strong position to help accelerate democratic reform). Awareness of these facts was necessary in order for the U.S. viewing public to develop the desire to challenge their government's tacit approval of a violent crackdown by the South Korean government. Those techniques for representing events may have been efficient at helping those leaders in the U.S. maintain the status quo (by dulling public criticism) or in helping television networks maintain their ratings and therefore

profits. However, this way of reporting was decidedly not efficient in facilitating the U.S. public's ability to discern important and objective changes in the world and hold U.S. leaders responsible.

Example #2 of Images in Reporting: The End of the Gulf War

The following quote from a participant-observer of the reporting on the Gulf War shows how the pressure on reporters to send home interesting images led reporters to produce ephemeral stories that failed to provide important facts to the audience.

> [Part of the blame rests on the media, who were in] a competitive frenzy to get on to the next story: the liberation of Kuwait City. . . . [As soon as the ground war ended] field commanders and combat troops were becoming free to talk about their exploits. . . but reporters were rushing in droves to Kuwait City. [Which was largely a symbolic event not important to future policy and budget debates in the way the Army's performance was] . . . the rush for news was driven in this war, as in no other, by the short attention span of television and the insatiable appetite for symbolic visuals. Thus the people who fought the war found [practically no] . . . audience [among reporters] interested in hearing their stories. (Fialka 1992, 6)

Here the important facts such as behavior of U.S. soldiers in battle were suppressed because of a collective focus on triumphal images of Kuwaitis welcoming U.S. troops. Viewers who relied on this news to inform them about the war were kept ignorant of many facts. Those facts would have been helpful in objectively deciding whether going to war was a good idea in the end. Instead, viewers had to make that determination based on images of celebrating Kuwaitis.

Example #3 of Images in Reporting: The Simulated Battle of 73 Easting

Up until this point, the discussion has been largely about news crews who create representations of events through the video camera. However, there is another way of creating representations now emerging. This new way involves using computers to create highly detailed mathematical models of real situations, in this case combat. Computer simulations can provide animated computer generated images of those models. Year by year, these computer generated images look ever more realistic. In the absence of available videotape of an event such as a tank battle, reporters may now use this new type of visual representation to accommodate television networks' need to tell stories through fascinating pictures in order to maximize profits.

Simulation technologies of representation may also be able to gain great credibility and then deceive, just like when the camera directs people's attention away from important facts. Computer simulations, when they are supposedly showing us events that actually happened, have an aura of credibility. Remember that with cameras this credibility comes from an implicit claim of showing the audience what is happening in reality as if the home viewer was there. Simulations cannot claim to directly show

what is happening since they only represent the data entered into them.[1] Simulations only provide the viewer with the visual output of a computer program.

Instead, these simulations gain credibility from their capability for extreme detail and their ability to escape the video camera's limitation of only being able to capture what happened from a very few locations. With a computer simulation one can view the action from any point of view, from close or far, and have time pass slowly or quickly. This freedom from the limitations of the camera may well give the viewer a feeling of omniscience. The ability to choose any vantage point, or see very detailed data about those aspects of the event the simulation is designed to capture, instill a feeling of depth and objective understanding which is deceptive. The viewer may know exactly the number of shells fired, when, at whom, and whether they hit. (Sterling 1993)

However this tells the viewer nothing about why the people are there fighting in the first place, the long term effects on the combatants and their families, and so on. This seeming omniscience is actually limited to the space and time of the battlefield, and the sense of omniscience discourages viewers from thinking critically about the images in the simulation. When faced with information-dense simulations, it is unreasonable to expect audiences to think critically about what is left out and why it was left out. It could well appear that because a complex computer simulation seems to permit the media and viewers scrutinize even small details, that everything important has been included. That would be an inappropriate conclusion however. Shapiro and Lang (1991) point out how as events experienced through media become more realistic and similar to actual events the more likely viewers are to confuse facts they learn from the media with personal experience. Also, see (Funkhauser and Shaw 1990) on this topic.

Readers may respond to such claims by saying that they have not personally seen these computer simulations in news coverage, and therefore concern over computer simulations in the news is too speculative. One possible response to this is to point to the future. Other tools developed by the military in order to help it see and react to the world better (video cameras, gyro-stabilized cameras, night-vision optics, communication and imaging satellites, etc.) have all wound up in use by present-day news media. One book about coverage of the Gulf War shows a picture of a tank battle computer simulation used on the television news. (Der Derian 1992, 185) The author has a videotape of a computer simulation of a battle involving aircraft and ships. That video was used to market Satellite Toolkit software (http://www.stk.com) to news producers at conference on Satellites and Reporting held in the mid-1990s. The author also has a tape of a Washington, D.C. television station demonstrating their new night-vision, high-magnification, helicopter-mounted video camera. As Wark said, “What the military saw in the last war, television will show us in the next.” (Wark 1994, 42) So it is worthwhile to consider what this new means of representation does before it becomes widely used in the news, to the exclusion of other forms of representation.

The significance of computer simulations of combat for reporting on war is this. If

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[1]. Soldiers who use simulations might argue that simulations do actually give a good understanding of what is actually happening. Good in the sense that those who use the simulation in training are more effective than people who did not when they find themselves in real combat situations the simulation models. However, that is an understanding that helps one win a conflict rather than help one understand it in the larger sense.

the media is constantly talking about *how* the fighting is being carried out in a war because interesting simulations of battles are available, the question of *whether* we should be fighting at all is neglected. It is neglected because such questions are typically large in context and require considering multiple events scattered out over time, and not just the battles. As a rule, depictions of combat itself cannot contribute to a debate on whether one's side should be fighting in the first place. There is one very important exception to this rule however: depiction of the deaths and suffering of soldiers or noncombatants. One of the author's uncles once said, "You have to look at that napalmed body and decide if you're okay with that". Seeing disturbing images of the bodily consequences of the use of force seems like it would tend to lead viewers to reflect on whether the use of force that led to that consequence was right. The crucial difference between simulations and photographs is that computer simulations of mechanized warfare (as well as images involving aircraft in flight and long range weapons) never show bodies and people. The following quote does an outstanding job at capturing the experience of seeing simulated combat.

> [Desert Storm's tank] Battle of 73 Easting has become the single most accurately recorded combat engagement in human history. . . . They came up with a fully interactive . . . digital replica of the events at 73 Easting, . . . It is fast and exhilarating and full of weird beauty. But even its sleek, polygonal, bloodless virtuality is a terrifying thing to witness and to comprehend. It is intense and horrific violence at headlong speed. . . . the flesh of real young men was there inside those flaming tank-shaped polygons, and that flesh was burning. . . . That is what one knows--but it's not what one sees. What one sees in "73 Easting" is something new and very strange: a complete and utter triumph of chilling, analytic, cybernetic rationality over chaotic, real-life, human desperation. (Sterling 1993: 96)

The deeper significance of the fact that no bodies are shown lies in the relationship between technologies of representation and the human capacity for empathy, the contagion of copying of emotion when a viewer sees emotion expressed by another person. In cases like this, images inundate viewers with details but are deprive them of other kinds of information. Viewers may need this other information (on the long-term causes and consequences of the event and the immediate bodily consequences of the event for its participants) to gain a full understanding of what took place.

Finally, if viewers are to question the representation shown and interpret it in the context of their own worldview, the representation needs to do two things that a computer simulation does not. In order for a representation to be open to critique, it must make a claim about the world and in that claim refer to facts or values to which the viewer already has an understanding of and opinions about. These computer simulations make no reference to anything outside the simulation itself and the military events, hardware and terrain that it describes. Similarly, is it not clear just what, if any, claims a computer simulation of combat makes about the world can be questioned in the way that other representations of war are. Representation of war via computer simulations seem likely to cause viewers to have a hard time critiquing them or gaining knowledge of important objective facts about the conflict because of the narrow context such representations provide.

We will next discuss how the greater speed with which representation of events are produced and delivered causes similar problems for viewers who wish to consider objective facts and evaluate what they are shown in terms of their own worldview.

Increased Speed and the Loss of Context in Representations

There has been a trend of increased speed in the world, largely due to advances in transportation and communication technology. This trend interacts with various physical, economic, and psychological constraints on:

- what events it is practical to represent to an audience,
- how events can be represented, and
- how audiences can respond to those representations.

The interaction of increased speed with the constraints on how the media can represent events causes the media to produce of cliché-ridden representations of events that lack context. We will next describe how it is that increased speed leads to the disappearance of context. We also plan to show why this loss of context hinders viewers' ability to evaluate the representations the media provide.

People alive today must cope with an accelerating pace of events. This is true in many aspects of life. Coping with speed requires people to both learn of changes in the world and act in response more quickly if they are to avoid harm from those rapid changes. This is an insight shared by the postmodernist Virilio (1983) (1986) and cybernetic theorists such as Beninger (1986) and Deutsch (1963). Helping people to react to events faster requires those who produce the news to change the way people produce the news in the following ways.

- Faster production (less time spent gathering the news and preparing to present it) to avoid news being obsolete by the time the audience hears it.
- Faster presentation (less time spent communicating the news), allowing viewers to learn of more events while spending less time viewing.
- Shorter follow-up period on stories. Less discussion of effects of previously presented events as well as on aspects of the larger story omitted in previous installments. Which permits viewers to keep up with more new events given a fixed amount of viewing time per day.

Meeting these requirements has led people in the media to change the way they communicate news to the public.

Shorter news gathering and preparation time leads to increased emphasis on live reporting and less editorial input into the story. Having less preparation time implies that reporters must more quickly figure out how to present the story. This makes them more likely to fall back on the clichés and stereotypes that first come to mind rather than taking more time to come up with a deeper and truer way of presenting the story. (Bourdieu 1998) Video cameras used to gather representations of events are part of camera crews. Camera crews consist of expensive workers using expensive equipment.[2] It is no wonder

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[2]. It is important to note that in 2002, digital video cameras and computers with video editing software are now affordable by middle class individuals in developed countries. For stories that happen to occur near a place where the reporter can get a high-bandwidth connection to the internet, there is no longer a need for (still prohibitively expensive) satellite transmission equipment to send video reports around the world. Because of this, the traditional monopoly of

then that these crews have always been scarce. It is only possible to send crews a few places at a time, thus they move around often. The phenomenon of "parachute journalism" where crews are sent temporarily on short notice to foreign countries that lack a permanent news bureau comes from the expense of maintaining permanent crews in less developed countries while still feeling the need to have crews on site when something important happens. These visiting crews lack familiarity with the local situation (i.e. context) surrounding the event they have been sent to cover. This contributes to the tendency to use cliché images as discussed above in the case of reporting on the revolt in Kwangju, South Korea. (Larson 1990)

Reduced preparation time also has the effect of permitting those in power to censor a report by delaying the transmission of it to editors by a few days. Delayed reports like these report can become so far behind the flow of events editors no longer consider them newsworthy and so the report doesn't get presented to the public. (Fialka 1992)

Faster presentation also has several effects on how people in the media create news stories. These are

1) Exclusion of details and context. This in turn implies that people with something to contribute to public discourse, but only if they can provide context for the arguments they wish to make, are excluded.
2) Focusing the story on elements (or selecting stories) that can be explained to the viewer quickly. This implies the use of cliché to make the story easy and quick to communicate.

Increased speed in the world requires in increased speed in the way the media present stories. This increased speed manifests in two ways. In the first sense, stories themselves have to be of a shorter duration, both in the time to present one story and in how long that story can be followed-up with other stories on the same subject. In the second sense, the media must tell stories closer in time to events they represent. This means the time taken to prepare stories must be shorter, with live reporting being the ultimate limit and goal. If, as Fialka noted happening in the Gulf War, a story cannot be reported fast enough (perhaps because the transmission of the reporter's story or photographer's picture was delayed) it quickly stops being newsworthy.[3]

Baudrillard and Ellul on the Effects of Speed in Mass Communication

As a result of the pressures mentioned above, news stories must be told in a kind of shorthand so that they can be created and presented in the short time allowed by the

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the television networks on video reporting of events may erode, at least for events in certain kinds of places. Independent reporters and new news organizations could proliferate as some, but not all, of the economic barriers to reaching a large audience disappear. The established networks will also become less bound by scarcity and expense of the tools of reporting as well, which might change their behavior. (Washington Post 2002)

[3]. Going back to the insights of the cybernetic theorists one can see how people's need to learn of changes more quickly so as to be able to react sooner led to creation of a system of reporting which puts such high priority on speed. Virilio's insight that people have a fascination with speed and the collapsing of distances it makes possible provides a complimentary reason for why audiences prefer their reporting to be speedy.

system that produces them. There is a historical analog to this. The wide adoption of the telegraph with its expensive cost-per-word in the 1800s encouraged reporters transmitting stories to their editors to write in the stripped-down verbal language we now think of as journalistic writing. (Schudson 1995) Today's scarcity of time available in which to communicate a message before it becomes considered irrelevant, or the audience grows bored, encourages people working in the media to use a visual as well as verbal shorthand. This shorthand includes a reliance on the readily understood cliché, since anything else would take too long to communicate.

Baudrillard suggests that the speed at which contemporary technologically-intensive communication occurs, where an image is presented only to be replaced by another image moments later reverses the traditional relationship between the viewer and the image. There is no longer sufficient time to analyze and think critically about what one is shown, instead "the image tests you" by eliciting some type of reflexive response. (Baudrillard 1993, 63) Baudrillard also has conclusions similar to Ellul's in positing that certain ways of communication rule out anything but banal, stereotypical messages. (Lovekin 1991)

Baudrillard also writes that the only reaction one can form in face of a stream of rapidly presented images is to match each image against a pre-established Code. This Code is the medium's and society's established lexicon of common meanings of representations. In order to discover what sort of reaction one is supposed to have to a representation, one instinctively draws upon the Code for its meaning and a personal response. Because of time constraints, the only other choice is incomprehension. Either the viewer 'gets' the pre-determined message or they 'don't get it'. The image now tests/interrogates the viewer's ability to quickly apply the Code rather than the viewer interrogating the image for how it fits into his life-world. (Baudrillard 1993, 63-64)

Those who produce such images are aware of this at some level. They know they are restricted in the ways they can depict things if they want to avoid arousing an audience response of incomprehension followed by that audience switching channels to a competitor whose representations 'make sense'. Note Chomsky's comment about below about why the TV program Nightline refuses to invite him. It makes sense then to say that people working in the news media are tested for their ability to conform to the Code the same way viewers are.[4] This is an important part of the theoretical argument for why a researcher should be able to expect that national audiences will tend, in large majorities, to interpret television reports in a certain way. It is also why that lack of freedom of interpretation can be traced back to the combination of technical means and human procedures used in creating the report.

In his later work, Ellul turned his attention to communication and how it has suffered from the imperatives of technology. He suggests that the technically efficient (in terms of the speed of comprehension) and increasingly predominant way of

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[4]. Baudrillard is not alone in thinking that audience prejudices constrain the media's ability to express opinion.

> [G]iant media firms . . . are almost always cowardly in the face of controversy—including support for change—for fear of alienating audiences. For example, sexual "liberation" came much later to . . . television characters and content long after it had arrived in the real world.(Gans 1993, 33.)

communicating using visual images and clichés, reduces human freedom. He argues this is so because visual and cliché communication do not allow ambiguity and irony, and thereby prevent both criticism and genuine communication between people. This suppression of criticism and hindrance of genuine communication is also, he claims, caused by fascination with the present to the exclusion of the past and the future, a fascination found in forms of communication which have come to be dominated by the logic of the technological system. The present simply is, and there is neither need nor time to reflect upon its significance before one's attention moves on to the next moment. While one's attention is directed at the present, one's attention is not available to reflect upon what led to the present situation or what the consequences of actions taken in the present will be. (Lovekin, 1991)

One author put it like this.

> [T]he more emphasis on speed, the more news identifies with current events and "the concentration on the immediate present edges out the accounts of process and history necessary for critical understanding" (Petersen, 1992:184)

Cultural Studies and the Idea of an Actively Re-interpreting Audience

According to Cultural Studies writers such as Stuart Hall, ideology and power are used to fix interpretation of an event when the event is represented. The people with influence over the media seek to stop debate over the meaning (interpretation) of an event by making one particular meaning seem naturally correct. The appropriate response to such attempts to stop debate is not to claim that there is a single correct interpretation, one suppressed by means of deceptive representations in the media. This is inappropriate because in politics there is often no consensus to on which to base such claims of any single interpretation of the even represented as being the correct one. (Hall 1997b)

Instead, critics should suggest how other valid interpretations are either concealed or discredited by such dominant media representations. Then critics should investigate; who benefits, who is idolized, and who is given power by those representations. Similarly critics should also note who is harmed, who is vilified, who is made powerless by those same representations. Demonstrating how certain groups of people are consistently helped while other groups are consistently harmed by the current dominant representations provides a basis for further action. Such action includes building awareness of the way dominant representations serve the interest of particular groups. (*Ibid.*) This encourages replacing those representations with ones fairer to those groups of people unfairly treated by the dominant representation.

Stuart Hall and others have also made arguments about how different groups might interpret the same image in different ways. Hall suggested the idea of "dominant", "negotiated", and "oppositional" readings of an image in the media by different groups pf people within the audience. With the dominant reading, the viewer fully agrees with the image's commonly accepted meanings and adopts that preferred reading. For someone adopting the dominant reading, the meaning of the image can seem natural, obvious, and transparent. A person from a minority group that the society discriminates against might well create an oppositional reading instead, one that is contradictory with the dominant reading, often reversing the accepted dominant culture's assignments of which people in the representation are the heroes and who are villains. In between the dominant (or hegemonic) interpretation and the oppositional one is the negotiated interpretation. This

implies that the viewer mostly agrees with the dominant interpretation but changes part of it in order to better conform with their own experience. (Chandler 2001) In addition, there is a famous study about how viewers from around the world interpreted the television series Dallas, sometimes even the same episodes, very differently from one another. (Ang 1985)

This raises an important question about the current project. Why should we expect that most of the people in the U.S. that view television's representation of war have largely similar reactions based upon the type of representation? There are multiple answers to this. The first group of answers relates to the conditions under which it is possible for audiences to resist adopting the dominant/hegemonic interpretation of an event. The latter group of answers relate to crucial differences in the ways networks produce drama series versus news and in the ways viewers consume drama series versus news.

We will first discuss the conditions necessary for forming an interpretation of the event represented on television that is oppositional to the dominant one. Not all viewers are equally capable of constructing oppositional or even negotiated interpretations when exposed to a representation of an event. Viewers must draw upon contrary personal experience with those involved in the conflict shown or they must have already developed a general distrust of the political and media establishment. Either of these can lead to an audience doubting claims about the actions of the government and its rivals even without evidence to the contrary. There are several barriers to viewers becoming able to do this however.

First, viewers are "implicated" when they view and comprehend any representation. In order to understand what is going on and avoid confusion, viewers must imagine themselves in (or personally observing) the situation as represented. That act of imagination and, possibly, identification with the people in the representation, requires that the viewer adopt a certain role while viewing the image. (Hall 1997a, 57-60) Typically, this is the role of the "ideal spectator." (Hall 1997a, 373) When a person views a television program, that program suggests a point of view from which the representation offered makes obvious sense (at least within the dominant culture), that point of view is the one "preferred" by the representation. (Hall 1997a, 228) Later in this paper, the reader should note how the types of representations described serve to encourage viewers to adopt certain attitudes towards an enemy or towards the use of force.

Some authors instead think about this phenomenon as the "subject position" that is created for a viewer by the representation. With repeated exposure to similar representations, the viewer can become psychologically invested in that role. This investment results from the viewer having spent a large amount of time maintaining the role. Dropping that role can lead the viewer to feelings of doubt and confusion (cognitive dissonance). Because of this, viewers are reluctant to do so. This helps to maintain the dominance of hegemonic interpretations. (Hall 1997a, 56)

Second, consider how news about war is different from drama in that it frequently deals with situations and groups of people totally outside the viewer's personal experience. Now consider that fact in conjunction with U.S. television networks' tendency to interview only people with politically centrist views familiar to most people. This persistent selection of centrist analysts hinders the ability of viewers to learn of

alternative interpretations of events, which they could then apply in the future. With no help from television in this regard, viewers must have other information that leads them to doubt a representation on the news. This weakens the "cultural competence" of viewers to resist the dominant interpretation of what networks show. For a discussion of "cultural competence" see (Hall 1997a, 376).

We now consider the various reasons why one should not expect audiences to respond to news programs they same way audiences do to dramas. These have to do with differences in the form of each and in differences in how people consume each of them. There are substantial differences in form between nightly news programs and drama programs such as Dallas. News programs consist of a series of stories, each a few minutes in length, with a beginning, middle and end. Drama series consist of many hour-long episodes containing multiple storylines. Several episodes may pass before one of those storylines resolves. Viewers have far more opportunity to reflect upon and revise their opinion about a story unfolding before them over several episodes of a drama than they do in a single two-minute news story.

In addition, the same people appear in almost every episode of a drama program. In news programs, however, no one except the news anchor and occasionally some reporters appear repeatedly. In contrast, the people shown or interviewed in the stories change every day. Audiences thus have less opportunity to form opinions about the people who are subjects of reporting than about characters in a drama.

Next, the camera shots that make up a nightly television news story are very short with the exception of introductions and conclusions by the reporter. Shot durations can vary from less than one second to at most a few seconds. Drama, on the other hand, tends to use shots of a longer duration. Only a small proportion of shots in drama last less than a few seconds. People viewing dramas have more time to think about what they are seeing in each shot and analyze it. Conversely, the people watching news have less time to do such analysis before the television presents them with a new image.

Finally, audiences approach television news in a different way than they do with dramas. People watching drama series, especially soap operas like Dallas, discuss what happened in the program with other people who saw it. Indeed, part of the enjoyment viewers claim to get from watching soap opera programs is the interaction with other viewers when discussing what has been happening, why things happened, and what will happen next. (Hall 1997a, 377-378) In contrast to this, most people who watch news programs do not discuss them with peers. News programs, unlike complicated multi-character dramas, claim to provide viewers with all the information viewers need. The pleasure most news viewers get comes from feeling informed about what is happening, not from discussing what has happened or will happen with others. Indeed, it is significant that the format of the nightly news in the U.S. spews so much visual and verbal information at the viewer so quickly. Due to this, it seems unlikely that viewers would recall enough of the details that viewers could have the same kinds of conversations about the news that viewers do about soap operas.

For all the reasons given here, the author doubts claims that audiences are so free to create their own interpretations of the news that any serious form of influence would be impractical. We now return to considering arguments people have offered which help answer the questions of how and why television reporting could influence the opinions of viewers.

Speed in (Re)presentation and the Use of Error-prone Heuristics

What more evidence can we give that that speed really does distort the way people working in the news media represent events and, in doing so, introduce certain kinds of bias? The work of certain political psychologists does in fact offer support to such a claim. There is an area of political psychology that deals with how people use certain mental techniques to reach conclusions based on limited information or limited time spent analyzing the information available. Speed, in terms of the short duration of representations, inherently limits time spent analyzing the use of force represented, so the viewer has to use these techniques, known as heuristics. It is worth noting that the psychologists started by looking for patterns in ways people think and the types of errors people make. The researchers then came up with psychological causes consistent with the patterns observed through experiments. If the common errors found to be associated with the use of heuristics would tend to produce the types of flaws in discourse suggested by Ellul and the Postmodernists, those latter authors' claims will have added credibility. Consider the following statement.

> [P]eople solve problems, including the determination of their own values, with what comes to mind. The more detailed, exacting, and creative their inferential process, the more likely they are to think of all they know about a problem. The briefer that process becomes, the more they will be controlled by the relative accessibility of various considerations. (Slovic, Fischoff and Lichtenstein quoted in Iyengar 1991, 131)

We should take seriously then the possibility that the U.S.' brief process for informing public opinion might lend itself to certain kinds of biases as heuristics are applied. Examples of three common types of heuristics and the errors associated with their use follow. The first type is the **Representativeness** heuristic. This relies on the similarity of current case to a stereotypical case. Some examples of this would be as follows. "The news on TV shows South Korean college students throwing stones at riot police again. It must be another student demonstration there." or "Saddam Hussein is another Hitler". The problem with this is that it will lead to frequently ignoring important facts that would lead to a different conclusion. (Mondak 1994)

The second type is the **Availability** heuristic. This relies on the ease with which examples supporting a certain conclusion can be brought to mind. Examples of this would include: "Iraq has broken many promises to comply with UN orders, so why believe that they will keep their word this time?" This heuristic can draw conclusions from too small a sample, over-generalizing. In politics particularly, some of the most important decisions are ones that involve correctly understanding non-routine situations. (*Ibid.*)

The third type of heuristic is **Simulation** (not to be confused with simulation-type television coverage). This involves constructing the most plausible scenario describing what is likely to happen. Example: "You want to reduce crime in cities. Which is more likely to work: creating more jobs so people can support themselves without turning to crime or building more prisons to contain those who already have committed crimes?" The problem with simulation heuristics is this: if the most easily conceivable scenarios is

false, then a person deciding based on simulation heuristics will show a bias towards the conclusions offered by that false scenario. (*Ibid.*)

So to summarize, people with limited time or information rely upon stereotypes, readily available examples, and initial plausibility of an explanation. How does this relate to the claims of Ellul and the postmodernists? First, the reliance upon stereotypes in the representativeness heuristic matches up with Baudrillard's concept of images testing the viewer, requiring the viewer to interpret them according to a pre-established Code (lexicon of meanings). (Baudrillard 1993, 63) This is also true of Ellul's insight that the influence of what he calls "technique" has made communication into the exchange of superficial banalities. (Lovekin 1991)

Second, the Availability heuristic tends to make its users pay more attention to the most readily available facts. Suppose that set of recently heard facts is roughly equivalent to the most readily available ones. If this is so, then we can conclude that people using this heuristic give too much weight to the present relative to the lessons of past and likely effects on the future when using the Availability heuristic. That would confirm Virilio's and others' observation that we have become obsessed with the present to the exclusion of the causes and effects of it.

Third, the simulation heuristic's exclusion of theories which are less plausible at first glance concurs with Ellul's criticism about communication being reduced to the exchange of banal statements. Chomsky makes a similar comment when he talks about not being invited on television news programs like Nightline because the format of those programs only allow guests to give sound-bite length answers to questions. Chomsky claims that the only kinds of sound-bite answers he can give sound bizarre to those who do not already understand the radical view of the world. Because of this, news producers do not invite him because of the rules that govern the creation of programs such as Nightline. Those who seek to communicate with the largest possible audience know that the public is prone to ignoring what initially seems implausible, so news producers stick to telling the audience what they already believe.

Speed as Barrier to Being Truly Informed

When people produce news in a way that restricts the information available as well as the time given to consider what is shown and said, it is important to consider how viewers' ability to exercise critical understanding might be hindered. It may be that viewers of this kind of news find it difficult to relate what the producers of the news show or say to what the viewer already knows about the world. Such relation of representations to the viewer's experience is important in two ways:

1) Viewers able to relate the representation to their own knowledge are in a position to challenge the representation's claims.
2) Viewers able to relate the representation to their own knowledge can expand their knowledge of the word in meaningful ways.

Suppose that news producers do in fact represent events in the news in a manner that makes it hard for audiences to relate the events shown to their own worldview. If that is so, then it follows that audiences will not be in a position to challenge claims or really inform their own view of the world. We will now look at some examples of the media's representing events involving the use of military force that illustrates the effects of speed on reporting.

Effects of Speed on Reporting: Censorship by Delay

> The more immediacy is emphasized, "the more subject journalists are to manipulation by public officials who know how to prey on people with stopwatch mentalities". (Petersen 1992: 184) The need for an event to be very current in order to be newsworthy can shut out contributions to public discourse which are otherwise perfectly in tune with the sort of emotionally powerful readily-decodable cliché stories the media routinely carry. This creates opportunities for censorship by delay. An example of this occurred in the Gulf War when photographs of an allied jeep driver mistakenly killed by an allied pilot disappeared for a few days while being brought back from the front by military courier. These pictures were not used once they reached editors' hands because they were no longer current. (Fialka 1992)

It would be an error to think that this effect is only applicable to very rapidly developing situations where new events are accumulating rapidly. If a piece of information can be suppressed for weeks or months until interest in the original story cools, then, while the story may not disappear, it will likely get far less coverage than it would have otherwise. If this occurs, the story will have less political effect because the disruptive information has removed the media/politics feedback loop that frequently occurs in crises. MacKenzie Wark provides a good discussion of such loops.

An example of this occurring happened with the news that the USS Vincennes' was in Iranian territorial waters when it shot down an Iranian airliner in the belief that it was a fighter on an attack run against them. During the months of investigation following that incident, if the media reported this information it could have aggravated a serious crisis in U.S.-Iranian relations. (House Committee on Armed Services 1992) Such a revelation would have tended to shift support in Iran to leaders there who wanted to respond violently. Later, once relations had improved, public admission of the fact that a border was crossed did not matter as much. Censorship by delay is a powerful political tool, with great potential for abuse.

Censorship by delay is becoming easier as the "shelf-life" of news stories grows shorter. As this trend increases, events people will not have to suppress information as long to kill that information's interest to news producers. For an example of the censorship by delay, consider the following. The work of news producers in the Gulf War was hampered by more than the U.S. Army's dislike for them. That work was also hindered by the technology-driven speed of both the army's and the media's operations. Fialka, a reporter who was in Saudi Arabia during the war, believes that this problem of speed was the most important reason for the breakdown in the news collection and reporting process in the Gulf War. The Army had great difficulty getting the reporters into fast-moving mechanized ground combat and keeping them there. The limited resources the military was willing to provide and the kinds of risks to both U.S. soldiers and reporters the army was willing to take created real barriers to putting reporters on the front lines. In addition, reporters could not get stories back to the editors fast enough assure that their stories reached editors in synchrony with the flow of events at other locations in the war, where access to communication facilities was available. This

breakdown then allowed the government to step into the gap with its briefings and smart-bomb films.(Fialka 1992) Consider the following quotes:

> [The media, expecting another Vietnam where they could hop, unescorted, between units to follow the action] were not prepared for a war of total, rapid, movement over a dynamic, trackless, extremely dangerous battlefield where someone without tactical vehicles, navigation equipment, military radios, and protection could easily get lost and killed. This war was short, brutal, and effective, and it afforded journalists no time to shop around. . . . (*Ibid*., 8)

> [In the Gulf War] the press were an indigestible lump being [forced by the pool system] . . . into a military press-handling system that was woefully short of resources and teetering on the verge of collapse. . . . . in this lightning war . . . technology stopped at the edge of the battlefield [most reporters were denied use of the battlefield communications equipment and were not allowed to bring their own]. . . . [While most U.S. Civil War reporting of major battles took 24 hours or less to get to editors] Accounts of major battles [in the Gulf War] took three to four days to reach New York because of . . . the Army-designed . . . system of couriers and its teams of reporter escorts[, which] were hopelessly understaffed, underequipped, and poorly trained and motivated for the job. . . . as battles raged, we (couriers, escorts, journalists) and news copy, film, and videotapes spent a lot of valuable time lost in the desert. . . . major battles . . . went virtually unrecorded, vital pictures [such as that of a jeep and its driver blown up by friendly fire]. . . aren't there, a great deal of copy and videotaped footage went no further than the editing room floor because it was outdated (*Ibid.*, 5)

> Military censorship in the literal sense of the word, was not the problem. . . . [the problem was lack of access to events combined with delays in filing stories which made them obsolete]. (*Ibid.*, 5-6)

Suppose for a moment the U.S. military was willing to permit live or nearly live reporting from the front lines, even though this created the risk of reporters accidentally revealing secrets to the enemy. Even if this was so, the speed of the military's operations in conventional wars in areas so remote that satellite communication is the only option, might still prevent reporters from staying in contact with editors. This could result in a structural censorship by delay. The British reporters in the Gulf War, unlike the Americans, were allowed take their satellite communication equipment into the field. Even these reporters were unable to report in some cases. The nature of contemporary maneuver-style warfare is not friendly to the work of reporters. A British TV editor noted that "There was a lot of frustration because it [the satellite dish] was moving a lot and it wasn't usable while moving", (Fialka 1992, 8-10, 63)

The lesson here is that the very pace at which the news moves (in many senses) tends to reduce the opportunity for statements to be made in public forums based on events in the past, sometimes even the recent past. Reporters who submit stories with too much about the past (or future) risk getting their stories cut by editors. People who must emphasize past (or future) events to make their contribution to public debate will also find themselves unable to do so. Those who insist on providing contextual information will likely have producers not invite them back to speak on television again. This is a real

world example of the concept of structurally distorted communication discussed earlier. (Habermas 1984, 333)

How then, does this relate to the viewing public's ability to learn of important objective events and discern the important from the trivial? Suppose there is important information that is not presented to the public because of the time constraints on what is relevant or newsworthy. Where this is true, the public must focus its attention on the features of the event closer to the present, even if those features are relatively trivial. In such instances, the viewer's ability to discern the important from the unimportant are impaired.

Effects of Speed on Reporting: Less Diverse Views

As noted earlier, Noam Chomsky believes that he is an unpopular guest on TV news programs in the U.S. largely because the only sound-bite-length claims he can make (about the motives and effects of U.S. foreign policy) sound bizarre to the average listener. His claims sound bizarre because the average viewer is unfamiliar with the premises of Chomsky's radical ideological view of the world. If a viewer is aware of those premises, Chomsky's claims are comprehensible whether one agrees with them or not.

Networks with a television program showing a person in the studio making certain claims implicitly tell the viewer that that person's views are worth listening to. Because Chomsky's claims about U.S. foreign policy sound bizarre to a public unfamiliar with his view of the world, putting him on will erode the network's credibility with those in the audience who cannot understand the reasons for Chomsky's claims. The television program then loses credibility because audiences expect a news source can and will give them an accurate representation of events. When someone on television gives an explanation of an event not corroborated by people on other channels, the claims from the different sources are in contradiction and the viewer becomes confused. News producers believe audiences will deal with this confusion by assuming that Chomsky is, as a Nightline producer put it, "from Neptune" and lower their opinion of the program and network that invited him on. The result of this is that television news producers rarely invite advocates of genuinely minority positions to the televised forums for discussing politics. A narrowing of opportunities for full public debate on policy matters occurs. People with ideologically views dissonant with mainstream opinion are not allowed to contribute (are silenced) because they simply do not fit the format. (Manufacturing Consent 1994).

In such news programs, a desire for fast communication (in terms of quick presentation), leads to limits on the time permitted to present an interpretation of an event. The effect of this is that news producers can only tell audiences things they have already heard before. Interpretations unfamiliar to the audience take too long to present in a way that makes sense. So there is a filtering effect where non-mainstream interpretations of events are rarely presented to the viewing public. This can interfere with audiences' ability to analyze what they learn from the news. Remember that analysis requires some connection between what the viewer is shown or told and what the viewer believes based on previous things they have experienced or been told previously. If news producers provide the public with only mainstream interpretations and analyses of events,

then they deny the public the foundation needed in order to think critically about mainstream interpretations. Indeed, as one author points out it may be that without a passionate (yet respectful and informed) public debate between people of differing views in the media, the public has little hope of reaching conclusions about what policies are good or bad. More information may not be as helpful to improving public debate as more genuine argument. (Lasch 1995)

Let us leave aside the question of viewers being able to draw upon personal experience with what the kinds of events represented in coverage of war. Only a small percentage of viewers in the U.S. will have experience with war. In order for a viewer to have a basis for disagreeing with a mainstream interpretation of an event, she must have some prior exposure to an alternative non-mainstream interpretation for that sort of event. This is why framing effects tend to be stronger on issues that audiences are less familiar with. (Iyengar 1991, 129) We have just discussed, however, why news producers rarely show such alternative explanations. So the viewer is not provided the means to actively critique what they are told and shown.

This has significance for viewers' ability to distinguish the important from the trivial as well. If, as stated above, the news focuses on trivia to the exclusion of the important, then the viewer will often draw conclusions without having important information. What was important by one standard (public participation in decision making) may be unimportant to news producers' standard of wanting to appear credible and be interesting. Allied soldiers accidentally killed by their own side could be considered important because it puts viewers in touch with the human costs of war. Editors considered that same event uninteresting, and therefore not important to show, because it was a few days old. (Fialka 1992) It is plausible that there could be other such events that editors do not consider interesting enough (perhaps it requires too long to explain or is a bit too old). These same events could also be very important for the public to know if the public is to be involved in decisions about their country engaging in war. This gap between these two conceptions of what is important to tell the public leads to doubt that the public evaluates events in the world in a transparent and rational way.

The Relationship of Images and Speed in Reporting to Critical Thinking

We said at the start of this paper that we would show how the way in which news producers represent events hinders the ability of viewers to do two things. First, distinguish between important and trivial facts. Second, evaluate what the news shows based upon what one already believes (one's personal worldview). Based on the observations in this paper by several people personally involved with the news media in different ways, one should not expect television news viewers to consistently form their opinions based on the important facts and their own worldview. Admittedly, the extent to which these observers' accounts are representative of the news media as a whole can be debated. However, what has been revealed here should discredit broad claims made by skeptics of media influence (Gowing 1994) (Neuman 1996), that viewers as a whole have no problem distinguishing important facts from trivial ones and bringing their own worldview to bear. To the extent that viewers do have problems with these two tasks, they should be more susceptible to having their opinions influenced by the way in which news is represented.

So, what has this paper shown about how the way the U.S. television news affects viewers' ability to discern what is important and to use their own worldview to evaluate what is being shown? We will first review the conclusions above that relate to the task of distinguishing what is important. Second, we will review the conclusions that relate to the viewer's task of using their worldview to question the representation of an event.

Distinguishing the Important from the Trivial

In the case of reporting on the Kwangju uprising, the news media represented a pro-democracy revolt in a way that looked like one of many student protests against the South Korean government. This made the audience less able to discern important facts about the situation (that a pro-democracy revolt had taken place in a country allied to the U.S.). (Larson 1990)

In the case of the reporting on the end phases of the Gulf War, news producers ignored important facts such as behavior of U.S. soldiers in battle, instead focusing on triumphal images of Kuwaitis welcoming U.S. troops. Viewers who relied on this news to inform them about the war were thus ignorant of important facts. (Fialka 1992, 6)

When reporting is highly focused on the immediate present, this inundates viewers with technical and political details about the present. Through a crowding-out process, viewers are unable to see or hear the kinds of information that many critics think is important in understanding the long-term consequences following the event for its participants (combatants and affected civilians). Similarly, the pace at which the news occurs and in which it is presented both tend to preclude the opportunity for statements to be made in the news based on events in the past (sometimes even the recent past). Analysts and reporters who want to emphasize past (or future) events to make their analysis find themselves unable to do so consistently. News producers do not always present important information to the public because of the time constraints on what is relevant or newsworthy. In such cases, public has no choice but to focus its attention on the features of the event closer to the present, even if those features are relatively trivial. When this occurs, viewers' ability to discern the important from the unimportant is necessarily impaired.

What is important by one standard (public participation in policymaking) may not be important by the standard of impressing viewers with the immediacy of the news coverage. An allied soldier being killed accidentally by that soldier's (and the viewer's) side is important because that event makes viewers aware of the human costs of war. The event was considered uninteresting however by editors because it was a few days old, and therefore thought to lack interest for viewers wanting the latest news. There could be many such events in which some details are uninteresting and unworthy of mention if what is important is to impress the audience with the speed of coverage. These same events could be very important however in helping to keep the public involved in decisions about the use of force that are made in their name. If skeptics of media influence make the claim that viewers form opinions based on the important facts, they must do two things. First, define what qualifies as important facts, hopefully with a definition others will accept. Second, show that the public is actually receiving facts meeting that definition of important in the news. If audiences often never get to hear the

important facts, then the likelihood they will form their opinions based on those facts is low.

Using One's Worldview to Evaluate Televised Representations

When reporting uses computer simulations of war, there is no reference to anything outside the simulation itself and the military hardware and terrain that it describes. Moreover, a computer simulation of combat at least appears to make no claims about the world that the viewer might already have an opinion or other information on. These other kinds of claims would be ones like:

- who is responsible for the fighting,
- what led to the fighting,
- what the effects the fighting have on people involved, and
- what it will mean for one side to win instead of the other.

These kinds of claims are open to question, unlike the more micro-level statements about the world that a simulation makes. Micro-level claims would be ones such as who shot at whom, whether the shot hit, and so on. Traditional visual representations of war have sometimes been able to make the more general kinds of claims listed above. Viewers of military simulations are likely to have a difficult time using their own worldview to critique that kind of representation of an event. This is because the narrow context such representations provide makes it difficult to form a connection between the event shown and the viewer's own beliefs and knowledge about the conflict.

Conversely, it is difficult for the viewer to question their own beliefs if what they are shown does not challenge the viewer to think about those beliefs. This can happen if, as in the case of using computer simulations, what the simulation shows is too abstract when compared with real experience.

When reporting uses computer simulations rather than videotape of combat, information that many think to be important is always absent. Just as what happened most recently gets the most attention from reporters, what happens to the machines used to fight the war (rather than the humans fighting) gets the most attention from designers of military simulations. Computer simulations of mechanized warfare never show bodies and people, so viewers are do not see the bodily effects of combat and the human expressions of emotion in and around combat. To the extent these cues for an emotional response to war are not seen by viewers, they are less able to inform their opinion with an emotional response to the event.

Suppose a viewer's worldview places importance on empathy with the people caught up in the fighting of a war. If that is so, an interruption of that process of the viewer forming an empathetic response to those involved makes it harder to for the viewer to apply their worldview in judging the conflict. So the viewer has no choice but to attempt to understand the conflict in another way, perhaps by using the framework for understanding offered by the experts presented on television.

Viewers could, in another way, face similar difficulties attempting to use their worldview to evaluate what they see on television. Assume for a moment that viewers see only mainstream interpretations and analyses of events. Viewers require some exposure to the non-mainstream ways of understanding the world in order to have some external

basis from which to judge (the mental tools needed to criticize) the mainstream interpretations of events they receive on the news. If viewers never encounter such non-mainstream beliefs, then they are more susceptible to simply assenting to and adopting the mainstream positions offered, with the alternative being apathy and withdrawal from political life. These two kinds of social responses to constrained public discourse can be put in the following terms. Noelle-Neumann's (1993) "Spiral of Silence" model seems to describe the conformist option. The second option of apathy is summarized in Baudrillard's observation that the mass public's predominant form of resistance against domination by the powerful in society is a practiced apathy, a refusal to get rhetorically, emotionally, or physically involved in the crusades led by those with power to change the status quo in some way. Instead of supporting or opposing such crusades, the crusades are simply ignored. (Baudrillard 1983b)

Conclusion

This paper addressed the concerns of those who are skeptical that any sort of media coverage is likely to have a significant impact on how viewers will form an opinion about a war. Skeptics would make the argument that both important events and the viewer's own worldview are far more central in determining what opinion the viewer will form. This paper responded by pointing out that this is not necessarily the case because of how the system of television reporting works. First, because television reporting can conceal important information or bury it among a mass of trivia. Second, because television reporting lacks context for an event, it can be difficult for the viewer to use their worldview to form an opinion about the event shown. Moreover, a reliance on television coverage to learn about the world can make it more difficult for the viewer to even form an independent worldview that is substantially different from the worldview offered by television's mainstream analysts and reporters.

This paper has provided reasons to think it possible that the way in which television news reports a story about a war could influence how audiences think about that war. We now return to the other goal of the project: Creating a theory of media influence which both unifies and solves the problems with the critiques of war coverage offered by media critics on the left and the right. In other writings I have theorized that, when exposed to certain images, the viewer either has an empathetic reaction towards those involved in the conflict, or an absence of an empathetic reaction. That empathy, when it occurs, could be focused in one of two ways: either on those helped or on those endangered by the U.S. using force, depending on who was being shown.

Experimental results by others showed that the empathetic response to depend largely on the presence or absence of certain visual cues for empathy. These reactions in the context of news coverage of war could make audiences more or less likely to favor using force, based on the presence or absence of those cues. A third kind of coverage was identified which was devoid of such empathy cues. This kind of coverage specifically depicts the equipment used to fight the war or abstract representations involving maps or computer graphics. This is simulation coverage. The effects of simulation, victims, and beneficiaries coverage on opinion can, using relatively uncontroversial premises from psychology, explain the kinds of effects described by both the advocates of the Nintendo War and the advocates of the CNN Effect arguments.

In future papers I intend to give detailed examples of each of these kinds of coverage from a real conflict. This later paper will offer an experimental design for an experiment that will try to answer the following question. Do beneficiaries, victims and simulation forms of reporting as used on television affect public support for the use of force in the manner predicted?

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