

9/11:

Propaganda,
Hollywood
Style

DANNY
SCHECHTER

ColdType

9/11: Propaganda, Hollywood Style

IN AN AGE when actor Arnold Schwarzenegger embodies a growing convergence between the worlds of movies and politics in one hulking frame, entertainment-oriented media once again manifests their power to influence what we think.

There was a good reason that Time magazine described the coverage of the war on Iraq as “militainment,” and there is a good reason that the Bush Administration is turning to Hollywood to embellish the president’s declining popularity. Their latest preemptive strike takes form of a movie packaged to remake the historical record on the 9/11 attacks and reelect Bush at the same time.

With the networks all downplaying the real-world events planned for the second anniversary of 9/11, it is not accidental that a made-for-TV movie is likely to draw most of our attention this time around. This is the story behind the making of a cable movie titled “DC 9/11: Time of Crisis,” a well-made and insidiously persuasive docu-drama that airs Sunday Sept. 7th on Showtime, a movie channel owned by Viacom, the company that runs MTV, VH-1 Comedy Channel, Nickelodeon and so much more.

So move over Madonna and the Rug Rats and even Leni Riefenstahl, Viacom presents our latest TV superstar: President George W Bush as produced by Karl Rove. the president’s in-house Machiavelli, with the help of Lionel Chetwynd, a

Republican toady, screenwriter and producer. The production includes the cast of Star Trek, a comedian known for his role as “the ripper,” and financial subsidies from Canada where this pro-American patriotic epic was actually made to avoid paying union wages.

This movie stands Oliver Stone’s “JFK” on its head. While his assassination caper blended real footage and dramatization to challenge the official facts of the death of a president, this TV movie uses some of the same techniques to mythologize the life of a living president still in the White House. “JFK” was denounced as Hollywood distorting history. Will “GWB” encounter the same denunciations in a media that has treated Bush with reverent respect? Don’t count on it.

Laugh if you will — as are many of those familiar with all the deceptions and contradictions in the President’s post 9/11 responses — but don’t underestimate how a well-produced story technique can shape and “embed” a pro-Bush narrative in our brains, leaving us with impressions, images and ideas that influence our political leanings.

Don’t be surprised when this film becomes a staple of campaign to come. Already, the Republican Party is extending their New York convention to stage an event at Ground Zero and exploit 9/11 one more time.

Here is the “back story.”

BEHIND THE SCENES

YOUR NAME IS KARL ROVE. You are the political svengali often called “Bush’s brain.” And you know you have a problem. You are stage-managing a politician who can be dorky, elusive and often his worst enemy. He walks stiffly, swallows his words, and comes off at times like a mannequin. You never know what he might say.

After you helped maneuver him into the White House — and what a task it was to get the Supreme Court to sanction that squeaker of an election — his public opinion ratings started to drop. He was the butt of vicious jokes, and widespread

derision. The TV comics were branding him a buffoon, 'the global village idiot' and a lot worse.

And then along come 9/11.

As the country went into shock, as the economy reeled, as fear stalked the land, you played queer eye to this straight guy. You gave him his personal makeover and his political purpose while concocting a new mystique with which to sell him as a man with a mission.

Poof!

A born-again president who avoided foreign policy like the plague in his first year in office was reborn once again as the savior of civilization, and freedom's best friend. The war on terror was now his crusade and he saddled up to lead the charge.

With you in the wings, Karl, Dubya the loser was transformed into George W Bush, warrior-king and global leader. You gave him his own dog to wag.

The Afghan war soon followed, and then Iraq. In the era of "Let's roll," he and his own Republican Guard were on a roll; ready to impose frontier justice like some Texas Sheriff on the prairie. The President's ratings quickly rose in a well-hyped climate of patriotic correctness.

And all it took was one major media event to turn the tide. "DC 9/11" is the official story of how a one well-constructed and delivered speech before a compliant Congress elevated a schlemiel into a statesman. That speech, recreated and rerun at this movie's end memorializes and mythologizes Bush as Hero.

(FYI: That speech "worked." Here are the stats. Overall, President Bush's antiterrorism-themed address marked 22 percent improvement in households (33.6/49 vs. 27.6/42) compared to his address on Feb. 27, 2001. Tuesday's address, which lasted about 55 minutes, also marked a 30 percent jump in total viewers (51.7 million vs. 39.7 million) and 26 percent in total homes (35.5 million vs. 28.2 million) compared to his first speech to Congress.)

After 9/11, slogans and simplification became Bush's strong suit. "You are with us

or against us” was the media mantra as he unleashed a doctrine of pre-emptive permanent war in the name of good versus evil. The President would later tell Palestinians that God “instructed” him to strike Saddam.

But, as you know, Karl, that good Lord works in mysterious ways. In a world of conflict and contradiction, what goes up comes down. As a student of political history, you know that what happened to Dubya’s dad could happen to him. Public support is always fickle.

And so as your client’s ratings began to fall, as Iraq transitioned from the great victory to an unmanageable mess, all the patriotic slogans and political rhetoric began to lose their magic. Soon, the best thing you had working for you was the disarray among the democrats.

But, no fool you, Karl, you had a media card up your sleeve. You had planned for this contingency. You knew well how media and political interests are entwined in a political system that has become a media-ocracy in which candidates need media attention and media companies need access and favorable legislation.

Media is power and using media well projects power. As the New Yorker’s media writer Ken Auletta put it most succinctly, “Communications is the United States’ fastest-growing industry, and is highly dependent on the government’s favor.” To curry favor and promote their interests, media outlets would soon be favoring the government.

Throughout the Iraq war, you had no problem getting the media companies on board. It’s hard to think of any way that a state-run media system would have done any more than the US networks did in selling the war and serving the administration. You knew why these enemies of yours in the falsely characterized “liberal media” went along so enthusiastically. And it wasn’t just because war is good for ratings.

You knew precisely why your administration had leverage over the spin of the news coverage even if the public didn’t. The news not in the news was that all of the big media giants, including Viacom, wanted something from the government

to boost their bottom lines more permanently.

THE FCC AND VIACOM

WELL BEFORE WAR and throughout it, they were lobbying the federal broadcast regulators at the FCC to pass new rules that would further deregulate the TV industry and enable the big to grow even more bigger.

“And so it goes at the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Pennsylvania Avenue these days,” writes industry critic Jeff Chester, “a time when the terrorist attacks have become a convenient leitmotiv to the media titans’ expansionist plans. It’s a not-so-subtle quid pro quo — we’ll wave the flag, you waive the regulations.”

So to get those regulations a-waiving, the media industry had to do some waving. Anne C. Mulkern of the Denver Post reported in late May 2003: “The nation’s most powerful broadcasters spent more than \$68 million over the past four years lobbying lawmakers and federal agencies. They doled out another \$13.4 million in political contributions since 1997, buying the ability to play golf with congressional leaders and join lawmakers at private resort getaways.” A study by the Center for Public Integrity found that over eight years the FCC took \$2.8 million for travel and entertainment from the industry it regulates. This week, under Congressional pressure, the FCC said it would discontinue the practice.

That agency is under firm Republican control with Michael Powell, son of Secretary of State Colin Powell, presiding as a chairman most ready to accommodate. On 9/11, the FCC was the only non-defense and intelligence agency in Washington open for business. A free market booster, Powell was ready to give the media business much of what they wanted.

And in a depressed economy, with advertising sales way off, and war coverage to pay for, they wanted deregulation badly.

So badly that Viacom’s President Mel Karmazin made seven visits to the FCC to personally demand new rule changes. He testified before Congress and baited critics of more media consolidation as “cranks.” They just didn’t understand the

issues, he said.

Others like Roger Smith, who writes the “It’s Only Money” column in *Variety*, disagreed. “Forgive me, Mel,” he wrote some time back, “but if the FCC under Bush and Powell proves any more accommodating ... the very concept of competition in broadcasting will disappear.”

On June 2, the media companies prevailed. By a 3-2 vote the FCC rewarded them for a job well done. But the FCC and the companies underestimated the storm of protest that followed, leading to a 400-21 Congressional vote to roll back what many saw as an FCC give away. President Bush has now threatened to veto the measure. Mel Karmazin is leading the industry campaign for reconsideration. The backlash, he said, “is about people not having information. What this is about is political candidates hating the idea that they have to buy time to get reelected. It’s really cool to trash the media.”

In Hollywood it also seems “very cool” to pose as liberal while running businesses that are conservative to the core. Notes Michael Posner: “Robert Thompson, of Syracuse University’s prestigious Newhouse School of Communications, says there’s a political paradox lying at the heart of Hollywood. “On the one hand, by background, education and personal opinion, most people would admit that the film and television communities do lean slightly more left of center than the rest of the population,” he says. “On the other hand, they’re working in a profession that by definition is about as conservative as it gets. AOL Time Warner, Viacom — these are huge corporate behemoths protecting the status quo.”

To further protect it, Viacom joined hands with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and General Electric NBC to use the media to defeat efforts to limit the power of media. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Sept. 2nd that their “lobbying effort includes the slogan “America Says: Don’t Get Between Me And My TV,” which is featured in ads running in Washington political publications, *The Hill* and *Roll Call*. According to the *Journal*, “The companies commissioned public opinion research, which not surprisingly concluded that 87 percent say they have an ade-

quate number of choices for receiving news. As a result these companies feel justified in speaking in the name of America. What is surprising is that the figure was not 99 percent, which is the number of Iraqis Saddam Hussein claimed voted to reelect him.

This background shapes the media environment in which films like “DC 9/11,” or TV series about the exploits of the CIA, are made, licensed and aired.

MEET THE VIACOMESE

YEARS AGO, A FRIEND WORKING AT MTV invited me to lunch and pointed to a corner of the Lodge, the in-house restaurant overlooking Times Square that catered to employees. That’s where THEY sit,” she told me, “The Viacomese.” In her eyes, and in the eyes of the other MTV kids, their corporate controllers were a nation apart, a world of number crunchers and merger-prone maniacs.

And the leader of their pack is 80 year-old Sumner Redstone, a lawyer turned theater owner turned media mogul who lived the big-is-better philosophy of media power. “I saw the consolidation of power taking place in the media industry,” he once said. “This global race will go to the swift and the strong. And Viacom, as we have repeatedly demonstrated, is among the swiftest of the strongest.”

Months earlier, in April 2001, Powell’s FCC gave Viacom, “the swiftest and the strongest,” a big present in the form of a 3-1 ruling that allowed the company to keep both CBS and United Paramount Network (UPN). To do so, the FCC also voted to relax a portion of its broadcast network ownership rules. It showed Viacom how important the government could be to its business ambitions.

Viacom’s top executives rarely advertise their political leanings, but liberal is not a term that comes to mind. Company founder Sumner Redstone, a billionaire famous for saying it’s “not about the money, it is about winning” was in military intelligence in World War II. A New Englander, He has been aligned with middle of the road Democratic politicians like Ed Muskie. He helped raise money for Al Gore.

But making money remains his first love. And spreading Viacom's programming and power globally has been one of his personal passions.

China is one market he is cultivating. On Sept. 28, 1999, in the midst of China's fierce crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement, Sumner Redstone was in Shanghai for a conference hosted by Time Warner-owned Fortune magazine and keyed by President Jiang. To the delight of the Beijing government, Redstone called for American press restraint in the coverage of China: "As they expand their global reach, media companies must be aware of the politics and attitudes of the governments where we operate. Journalistic integrity must prevail in the final analysis. But integrity should not be exercised in a way that is unnecessarily offensive to the countries in which you operate."

And why does Redstone counsel against aggressive media exposure of abuses in China? Because Viacom is making a lot of money there. He told an investment conference on September 10, 2001, a day before the terrorist attacks. "In China, our revenues will be up around 40 percent this year. And they're doubling every few years. During this trip, I met with every important minister in China. I met with Minister Xu and Minister Ding, who oversee the entertainment industry. On my last day, I had lunch with Dr. Jiang, the president's son, who is a great friend and supporter. And at the end of the trip I met with the president of China, Jiang Zemin. They were fruitful meetings, and we expect to be able to announce agreements in the near future to expand our distribution in China." The Middle East was another market he cultivated. Well before the Iraq war, Redstone was in the region. According to a publication of the Adham Center for Television Journalism at the American University in Cairo, "Viacom is the junior partner in the Showtime Middle East joint venture with KIPCO (Kuwait Investment Projects Co.), an investment vehicle for certain members of the Kuwaiti royal family. Showtime carries a bouquet of some 16 Western channels plus 10 audio services, and claims some 180,000 subscribers." Redstone spent some of his time in the Gulf being given a guided tour of Dubai by its crown prince, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al

Maktoum. Explained Redstone, “ Showtime here is a modest part of our operation, but it may serve to bring us a greater presence in this part of the world. I am seriously, seriously impressed.”

In addition to his other political interests, Redstone has long been active in Jewish philanthropies and is a big backer of Israel. So is Mel Karmazin. Years ago, he hosted an industry dinner for Rupert Murdoch who was being honored for his aggressive support for Israel.

After 9/11, Karmazin, known as shock jock Howard Stern’s patron and who usually avoids overt politics, quoted Martin Luther King, Jr in a speech to an industry gathering: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

He said at the time, “We must continue to fulfill our duty to serve the public interest in a time of national crisis. This is a time of controversy that will require endurance as our spirit is tested by war and fear.” Is airing DC 9/11 part of this “duty?”

The men at the helm of Viacom are not primarily ideologues. They are pragmatists, willing to collaborate with any government — ours, China’s, Kuwait’s — if there is a payoff. They will deal with everyone and anyone. They know how to accommodate governments even though they are businessmen first — and good ones, as media historian Robert McChesney acknowledges:

“Sumner Redstone and Mel Karmazin have both singularly been the most brilliant capitalists in the media in the last decade. They’ve made the most money because they’ve understood first and most effectively how you convert the entire day into an infomercial to maximize profit. They’ve degraded and degenerated any notion of editorial or creative autonomy in our media system, unlike all others, even Rupert Murdoch lags behind them.” But good businessmen know that the best way to get along is to go along. During the war, Redstone’s MTV chose not to sell commercial time to an anti-war group that wanted to use its airwaves to call

for a protest. Why upset the government when your company has business before it?

KARL ROVE GOES HOLLYWOOD

SO IT WAS NOT SURPRISING that in November 2001, Karl Rove turned to Sumner Redstone and other media company executives to mobilize Hollywood to help the government fight the War on Terror. (An earlier meeting in October of Hollywood creative types at the offices of a well connected entertainment law firm did not go well because those invited all had ideas but not the power to implement them.) Film Director Lionel Chetwynd, with a long history of serving Republican causes, was at the first meeting, which recommended that Rove climb the corporate ladder.

Rove's next move was to go right to the top. Variety's editor Peter Bart wrote at the time, "The industry's top leaders, including Viacom Inc. chairman Sumner Redstone and News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch, will assemble in Beverly Hills ... to hammer out a specific agenda for the entertainment industry to aid the fight on terrorism ... The invitation stressed the nonpartisan nature of the meeting ... while stressing the importance of launching an industry-wide effort to help the war effort."

The Hollywood people feared government attempts to use them as propagandists. Disney's Bob Eiger made their point: "We're not going to set out to influence opinion in a manner that could in any way be construed as a propaganda effort backed by the administration." But, writing in Toronto's Globe & Mail, Doug Saunders saw what most American critics did not: "Why would they need bother? For many years, Hollywood's most prominent products, its major studio films and TV series, have been almost indistinguishable from government-funded propaganda." Rove disclaimed any propaganda intent. "That's not our goal," he said: "The industry decides what it will do and when it will do it. Content is off the table."

This meeting came and went. The industry “took the meeting” but little was decided. Nikki Finke of the L.A. Weekly investigated, quoting a longtime Democratic operative in the entertainment business.” “By all accounts, that first meeting was a disaster because the wrong people were in the room. Which is why you saw a follow-up meeting ... that attempted to bring in all the studios at a much higher level and engage in a more productive and meaningful dialogue.”

“What do they mean ‘the wrong people’? The whole idea was inclusion, and that remark speaks to exclusion,” complained veteran screenwriter and director Lionel Chetwynd, a well-known Hollywood Republican and new appointee to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. “It’s like they tried to fight a war with only generals and not ground troops.”

LIONEL CHETWYND TO THE RESCUE

CHETWYND VOLUNTEERED TO FIGHT on the ground — and make some money while doing it. He knew that abstract ideas do not sell as well as specific projects. He created the concept, originally called the “Big Dance.” He then persuaded Rove to back it. Later, Rove and Chetwynd decided that making a pro-Bush film would be easier than moving a hyper competitive industry that mostly focused on making money to make propaganda movies for international markets. In short what had been sold, as an effort to enlist Hollywood to win over public opinion overseas had ended up with a film aimed at selling the Bush administration at home.

Saunders explains, “Lionel Chetwynd, the film’s creator, sees nothing untoward about his role as the semi-official White House apologist in Hollywood. For him, having a well-connected Republican create the movie was a way to get the official message around what he sees as an entertainment industry packed with liberals and Democratic Party supporters. He said “I threw myself on the mercies of my friend Karl Rove.”

Rove knew his resume. Chetwynd had produced TV movies and documentaries

on POW's at the Hanoi Hilton, Kissinger and Nixon, the Bicentennial, Eisenhower, Carl Foreman, Tom Clancy's "Net Force Bloody Winter," "The Man Who Captured Eichmann," "Ruby Ridge: An American Tragedy" and the Bible. He also did "The Heroes of Desert Storm" and was brought in to finish the "Movie of the Week" lionizing New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani after it was decided that the original script did not portray him uncritically enough.

All of his films including his latest, a holocaust thriller about an American Schindler, "Varian's War" have had questions raised about their accuracy. Daryl Miller's review in the LA Times called it "A mess of a movie that leaves viewers with more questions than answers about Varian Fry ... Clumsily constructed and hollowly acted, it's a project that its lead performers — William Hurt and Julia Ormond — along with Barbra Streisand's Barwood Films, should quickly try to bury in their resumes ... Writer-director Lionel Chetwynd fudges a lot of facts."

The newspaper Jewish Week hated it as well: "Varian's War has the distinction of being a fairly complete catastrophe. To add to the catatonic direction and wildly out-of-tune acting, the film has the hermetically sealed look of a total studio product." In March 2003 President Bush screened the film in the White House with Chetwynd as the honored guest after Weekly Standard editor Fred Barnes sent a copy to Karl Rove, urging him to show it to Jewish organizations.

Chetwynd later boasted to Variety: "The President and First Lady thought the pic was 'fantastic' and lingered an hour after the screening to talk about the making of the film." In that discussion, Bush "also wanted to know more about the people who are making movies." Chetwynd says he became convinced: "We have a friend in the White House."

Not all of Chetwynd's collaborations have won such support. Along with David Horowitz, another leftist turned right-winger, he executive-produced a PBS series titled "National Desk" for three seasons. It was lavishly funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PBS as a sop to conservatives in Congress, ostensibly as "balance" to the allegedly left-wing Frontline. (Horowitz has since sued

Chetwynd claiming he ripped him off of substantial monies that were due him.)

And considering that during the Writers Guild Strike in 1988, Chetwynd led the campaign to call it off, earning him the label of “scab,” his credentials to make a Bush propaganda film were perfect.

Rove soon gave Chetwynd the go ahead, and total cooperation and access soon followed, beginning with a long meeting with Bush at his Crawford ranch. It was then that British born and Canadian-raised Chetwynd became an acolyte. “He took me through his nine days, and it was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life to sit in the Oval Office with this man and listen to him explain what it was like,” he said afterward.

Meetings with Donald Rumsfeld, Ari Fleisher and Bush aide Andy Card soon followed. It was the media-conscious Card who first briefed Bush on the 9/11 attacks and who is the first character you see in the movie. He told the New York Times that the administration waited until after Labor Day 2002 to start talking up war on Iraq. The reason: “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.”

MAKING THE MOVIE

RICHARD VON BUSACK OF SILICON VALLEY’S weekly newspaper explained how this product is structured: “‘DC 9/11: Time of Crisis’ will follow the attack from the Washington, D.C., perspective, beginning with the attacks and ending with George W. Bush’s speech of revenge on Sept. 20. In what some might see as a disturbing blend of documentary and dramatic reenactments, actual news footage of the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks will be woven in with the drama of Bush’s flights around the country on the fateful day and the comments he made as he went.”

He also explains that “‘DC 9/11: Time of Crisis’ is the first non-documentary feature film lionizing a sitting president in 40 years. The last would have been 1963’s ‘PT 109,’ which recounted the wartime adventures of John F. Kennedy, based on

his memoirs. It's a case of proven heroism vs. still-fresh actions and reactions that Americans remain divided about."

Chetwynd has denied charges his movie is propaganda. "This isn't propaganda," he told the Washington Post. "It's a straightforward docudrama. I would hope what's presented is a fully colored and nuanced picture of a human being in a difficult situation."

The Independent (U.K.) commented, "The fact that it paints its subject in the best possible light at every turn certainly can't hurt the Bush cause, however. It is part of an emerging pattern whereby the anniversaries of Sept. 11 are exploited as political advertisements for the Bush administration. This year it will be the airing of "DC 9/11;" next year, with just two months to go before the next presidential election, it will be the Republican National Convention in New York."

The film portrays Bush glowingly as a forceful leader, the way Chetwynd came to see him. Already a Bush backer and financial contributor to his campaign, he soon became a groupie gushing about the president in the way the Ba'ath party used to genuflect before Saddam. "There's a warmth and a truth and a strength in him, and you know it's there. Americans know it's there. That's the secret of his (public approval) ratings," he raved recently.

Well, maybe, but just in case that public approval dropped (as it has already) soon, there was a script deifying the president, a polished production that was sold to guess who?

Viacom.

And by making the film in Canada, Chetwynd, another booster of free market capitalism, benefited from government subsidies. As one reader commented to a Canadian website, "Canadian tax dollars will be used to cover a good chunk of the bill. Canada candidly opposed the war, but now its citizens have no choice but to aid and abet the Bush spin-doctors in the aftermath. Blech!"

Doug Saunders in The Globe and Mail explained how this subsidy system worked: "While the film is intended for U.S. viewers, it is produced in collaboration

with Toronto-based Dufferin Gate Productions in order to take advantage of Canadian government incentives. It is eligible for the federal Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit, the Ontario Film and Television Production Services Tax Credit, and a federal tax-shelter program, which together could result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in Canadian government checks being sent to the producers.”

Fox News is all over this film that relies on its coverage, or a simulation thereof, to pace the story. Somehow it’s unsurprising to learn that Chetwynd ran the script past a panel of Fox News faves like Fred Barnes, Charles Krauthammer and Morton Kondracke. Scenes considered “less than flattering” were dropped. In typical media speak, Showtime’s chief Jerry Offsey treats the film as if it were just all about story and not politics: “We found there was just a really good story to be told.”

The Canadian press has been far more critical of Chetwynd than the media in the US, perhaps because they know him better. Toronto Star columnist Linda McQuaig writes, “Lionel Chetwynd, the writer-producer of this heartily pro-Bush movie, is a kind of west coast David Frum — a Canadian who has fully embraced the Bush revolution and even joined the administration (sitting on a White House arts committee).” It was Frum who coined the “axis of evil” phrase for Bush’s 2002 State of the Union speech. He later wrote a revealing book about his time in the White House.

McQuaig contrasts the access provided to Chetwynd with the lack of availability of 9/11 documents: “This access is in stunning contrast to the short shrift the administration has given to serious attempts to investigate 9/11, including efforts by a joint Congressional inquiry, which was denied access to top officials.”

The White House is currently blocking publication of most of the inquiry’s 800-page report. It is also putting roadblocks in the path of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, which Bush initially resisted establishing, but agreed to, under pressure from 9/11 families. Among the many questions in need of answers are:

Why was the multi-billion-dollar U.S. military unable to muster any defense of the nation that day, not even sending U.S. fighters up to investigate the hijacked planes?

Peter Carlin of the Oregonian predicts that tapes of the show will be a big seller at the Republican National Convention “where they may well share shelf space with the military’s self-produced video of the Jessica Lynch rescue and Bush’s own ‘Top Gun’ appearance, via jet fighter, on the USS Abraham Lincoln.”

The film stars Bush look-alike Timothy Bottoms, who starred in B movies like Ripper Man, of which one critic said “he turns in an embarrassing over the top performance.” The same might be said of his performance in “DC 9/11.” He played Bush before in the Comedy Channel spoof “That’s My Bush!” Now he is playing the role straight but still goes over the top in mocking his accent and vacant look.

What’s still missing of course is a counter narrative to films like this or even a documentary that raises all the unanswered questions. Peter Shaplen calls attention to a paper, produced by the Center for Cooperative Research and written by Allen Wood and Paul Thompson titled, “ An Interesting Day: President Bush’s Movements and Actions on 9/11.” He writes, “This document has been described as a compelling document that relies on journalist’s notes, timelines and timetables to painstakingly recreate what President Bush knew, when he knew it, how he reacted, and what really happened behind the scenes of the White House. It offers a striking counterpoint to the administration’s carefully controlled version of events.” But will a film with this point of view ever get made? And if it does, who will air it?

Probably not Viacom’s Showtime.

TIME OF MEDIA CRISIS

IF “DC 9/11” DOES WELL, there may be more to come. Already, CIA Director George Tenet was the guest of honor at the annual media summit hosted by investment banker and media dealmaker Herb Allen at his resort in Utah.

Meanwhile, Nina Teicholz reports that, “a separate and much more successful effort, not being run out of the White House and unreported in the press, is underway to improve America’s image abroad. Several dozen of Hollywood’s finest talents have been hard at work developing Arabic-language movies and TV shows that could be ready for export to the Islamic world as soon as March.”

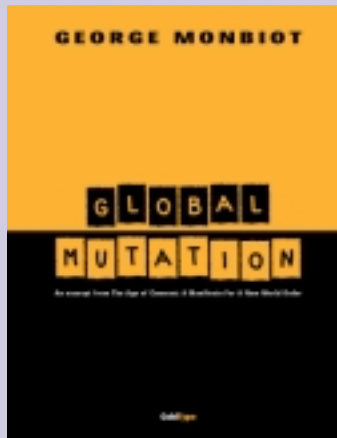
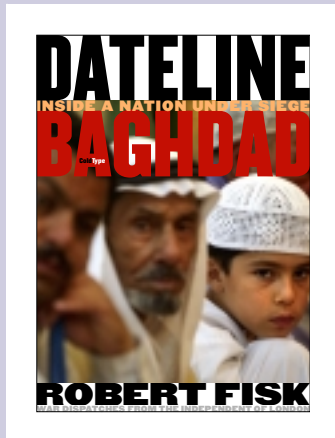
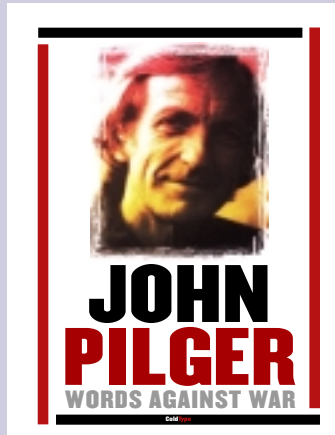
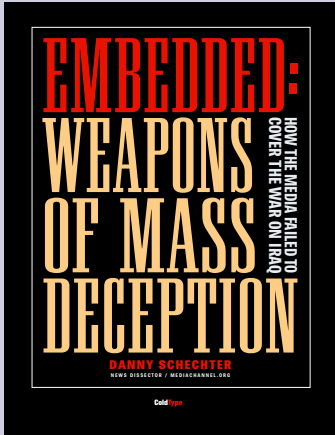
And so it goes, a political war within a cultural war within a media war.

“DC 9/11” illustrates the direction our propaganda system is taking because it is also the direction that our news system is already headed. More storytelling instead of journalism. More character-oriented drama. More narrative arcs. More blurring of the line between fiction and truth.

“DC 9/11: Time of Crisis” is also a sign of the crisis in our media system. Made by a “liberal company,” it may help reelect a conservative president. It is the latest tool in the media drift to the right, but it is not the last.

Danny Schechter edits MediaChannel.org and writes a daily weblog. His latest book is “Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception: How the Media Failed to Cover the War in Iraq.” (Prometheus Books).

Writing Worth Reading From Around The World



Download more books, booklets, essays, newspapers and magazines
– all in pdf format, all free of charge – at

www.coldtype.net

(Click on this link to enter web site)

ColdType

Published by ColdType magazine at www.coldtype.net