

Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia

Edited by Mahmoud Eid

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A Book Review by

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Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia (2014), edited by Mahmoud Eid, is much more than a top-level scholarly analysis of terrorism in the media. It provides a prescient perspective and a synergistic dynamic for dealing with a most critical issue of mediated illusion as human reality.

Traditionally, the science fiction genre has produced the most prescient “seers” of the future. Aldous Huxley in his novel *Brave New World* and George Orwell in his novel, *1984*, are exemplars. However, as Neil Postman pointed out, their views are not the same: “There are two ways by which the spirit of a culture may be shriveled. In the first—the Orwellian—culture becomes a prison. In the second—the Huxleyan—culture becomes a burlesque” (1985: 155). More recently, Reeves and Nass (1996) have researched *The Media Equation*, a compilation of 35 studies that reach a unanimous conclusion—at unconscious levels—media are perceived by all demographics as “real”. The unconscious perception that illusion is real has, therefore, been verified, and it should re-direct scientific research. As an exemplar of this mandate, Eid’s book is unprecedented—even profound.

At the threshold of an age of mediated illusion, the “multifaceted contents” of this book “across various disciplines” provides scope and a prescient perspective that boasts scholarly excellence and fundamental pragmatism.

Though the theme of the book is terrorism in the media, the implications of the theme penetrate deeply into issues of the emergent mediascape. This altered reality is not limited to press, radio, television, or Internet news, but includes films, television entertainment, television drama, graphic novels, computer games—the entire gamut of mediated illusions. It is in this sense that the scope of the book’s significance is vast. The editor avoids getting lost in the labyrinth while applying consummate scholarly discipline to the subject. The book includes many practical perspectives on the illusion—the ways that terrorists choreograph events to leverage media coverage, and the ways the media uses terrorist acts for their own often sensationalist purposes. The resulting collusion is a real-time altered reality based on fear and destruction.

The challenges of addressing the altered reality projected in a ubiquitous virtual media are counterintuitive to human minds that think in terms of materialism and separation. This

generates competition and a pervasive morality based on “us vs. them”. In this process, the value framework of integrity or oneness is lost. However, persistence in portrayal of unity and synergism may reverse the trend, so that values of cooperation re-emerge. This book successfully addresses the irony of reality as media illusion and contributes valuable insight as to reframing the collective unconscious. Because it does not lose track of the underlying integrity of its content, the implicit scope of *Terroredia* may be unprecedented.

The potentials for philosophical discussion of ontological integrity are infinite, but issues related to terrorism in the media cannot wait. Without losing the ontologically integrated overview, *Terroredia* projects kaleidoscopic perspectives on the illusions of terrorism created by the media. The book addresses a comprehensive range of issues surrounding terrorism in both traditional and new media in order to explain the phenomenal relationship between terrorists and media personnel. In other words, the relationship between these two groups is synergistic. Both groups strive to capture public attention with vivid displays. In the words of the editor, “Mutual interaction, dependency, and inseparability have characterized the co-existence of terrorists and media personnel”.

The ethical challenge being faced by the media is a bit like isometric exercise. Terrorists’ awareness of how to use the media without being used by the media is in isometric proportion to the media’s efforts to benefit from covering acts of terrorism while avoiding being used by terrorists. *Terroredia* strikes a fine balance among proportional perspectives. The balancing strategy used by the editor is to divide content into eight sections each consisting of two chapters that mirror one another—one “terrorism-focused” and the other “media-focused”. This “mirror” format provides readers with important thematic elements inherent to the relationship between terrorism and the media, and it provides a clear context for studying the ways in which terrorism and the media are integrated.

For example, in Section Three, “Terrorism Types & Media Stereotypes”, the first chapter identifies eight terrorist typologies, and the second chapter discusses media stereotypes of terrorist activity and explains how these stereotypes are formulated with the use of simple and complex rhetorical techniques. In Section Four, “Terrorism Tactics & Media Strategies”, the first chapter reconsiders arguments relative to tactical and ideological “contagion” theory, while the second chapter explores differences in the fear-mongering roles played by American and Quebecois media relative to the War on Terrorism. Section Eight, “Rationality & Responsibility”, advocates the deconstruction of terrorism upon the discourse itself: its premises, beliefs, fears, definitions, rhetorical devices, imaginary constructions of the enemy, the inability to distinguish ritual bluff from actual combat, the logic of taboo, the injunction not to humanize the terrorist other, and moral self-righteousness. The final chapter puts a fine point on questioning the effectiveness of media performance during times of terrorism through the examination of their decision-making processes in terms of rationality and responsibility.

The organization of the book is more than commendable as it offers a sane approach for analyzing the media illusion. Like dreams, the illusion is an altered reality that dances to the tune of unique personal perceptions in a unified field of quantum entanglement. Needless to say, trying to think in terms of the unconscious is problematic, and it is challenging to apply rational parameters to the apparent irrationality of illusion. A similar challenge faced physicists when contemplating the second law of thermodynamics which deals with the random disorder known as entropy. Clark Maxwell was the first to point out that “a conscious sorting demon” can reduce entropy and reverse the Second Law of Thermodynamics (cited in Foster, 1985: 35). In order to

study the paradigm shift, parametric shifts in thinking are required. The primary genius of *Terroredia* is its harnessing of these sorting demons within the organization of its chapters.

Eid is concerned with the dynamics of the quintessentially critical illusion of terrorism. In his BBC documentary, *The Century of Self*, Adam Curtis (2002) details the consequences of misuse of mediated illusion in order to create fear-based illusions. The political consequences of such misuse of the media illusion led directly to the arms race, wars and rumours of wars, heinous covert activities against faux “enemies,” and eventually to the “war on terror”.

The fundamental challenge facing the modern media is to maintain a clear focus on the fact that everything is interrelated. Given the sheer “karmic” scope of this mediated illusion, the subject of terrorism seems intractable—nearly impossible to characterize or to study with a degree of sanity. Nevertheless, *Terroredia* does both, and approaches the subject with admirable scholarship and astute pragmatism. Everything affects everything else, and this is true not only as a unified field of energy, but as a unified field of cognitive dimensions. Such integrity belies every aspect of terrorist polemics and assumptions as well as mediated stereotypes and prejudices. Accommodating the synergistic reality of mediated terrorism, yet not losing sight of the larger issue of civilized responsibility requires exceptional experiential scope and wisdom. *Terroredia* does not fail the reader on either count. It is an exceptional treatment of virtual integrity from the front lines of media experience to the analysis of the generative dynamics that allow mediated coverage of “terrorism” to become “real” in the arena of public perception.

References

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About the Reviewer

Stephen Brock Schafer is a Principal Lecturer in the Department of Humanities at Digipen Institute of Technology located in Redmond, WA, USA. His research is based on the assumption that drama-based video games provide a cognitive research analog for probing the virtual reality created by the media. In theory, the dramatic archetype provides access to unconscious cognitive fields in a mediated dreamscape. Such research would lead to an enhanced biometric understanding of learning and personal transformation, and it would address the critical need for global media policy reform, educational reform, and the development of new economic models in the incipient “Age of Mediated Illusion”. He has developed an advanced curriculum in psychological drama-based writing for video games and has taught an array of classes that

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