Tabloid Terror

WAR, CULTURE, AND GEOPOLITICS

FRANÇOIS DEBRIX

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We live in a tabloid era, in which image outweighs substance and the partisan soundbite overwhelms independent policy. But rather than merely decrying modern shallowness or attempting to reinstate the rule of reason, *Tabloid Terror* analyzes the methods, the effects, and the mechanisms by which international relations reach the US citizen.

Deftly dissecting the interrelationships of national identity formation, the media fabrication of news and public opinion as tabloid punditry and sensationalist entertainment, and the impact of intellectuals of statecraft's populist views and publications, Debrix explains how a discourse of fear, terror, and war was deployed in US public culture before 9/11, and how such a narrative – supported by visual representations – became even more dominant and destructive as a result of the Bush administration's exploitation of danger and insecurity after 9/11. Debrix's analysis brings American popular cultural sites (war images and military ads, photojournalistic displays, popular TV shows, internet pamphlets, Fox News pundits' programs) into contact with advanced critical social and political theorists (Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, Judith Butler) and with the writings of foreign policy intellectuals and practitioners (Robert D. Kaplan, Samuel Huntington, Victor Davis Hanson, Tommy Franks) in order to demonstrate how a model of tabloidized international relations and geopolitics has been produced with a view toward conditioning the public to accept a boundless war on terror and endless scenes of violence and destruction of "evil others." The fields of International Relations and Geopolitics sorely need such analytics that examine how people in their everyday lives are made to relate to transnational (geo)political issues.

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Acknowledgments

I started to conceive this project back in 1999, at a time when the cultural politics of fear, danger, and emergency in the United States were heightened by the proximity of the end of the millennium and by the growing presence in the media of the Y2K technological scare. Yet, my concern with and interest in the tabloid production of geopolitics, terror, and eventually war fully developed in the months that followed the turn of the millennium as I noticed how (virtual or actual) bookstores in the United States started to fill up with publications by academic scholars, policy-oriented think-tank contributors, and media pundits urging Americans to be ready for the next catastrophe (and thus despite the fact that Y2K had not led to the chaos that had been announced). In many ways, in the broadly understood American media, these publications already set the discursive stage for the post-9/11 public culture in which ideas such as a war on terror, fighting evil, or limiting democratic debate to secure the homeland would become common everyday notions and realities. Although I witnessed the visual atrocity of the September 11 terrorist attacks with shock and incomprehension (like most academics in the United States I believe), the almost immediate take-over of public debate after 9/11 by tabloid type literatures, images, and rationalizations did not surprise me. In many ways, this discursive and representational phenomenon constituted a continuation (but with different inflections) of the public and popular narratives of fear, danger, and resecuritization that many US (pseudo-)intellectuals had wanted Americans to be aware of since the late 1990s. My task then (and now) would be to try to make sense of these expanding discursivities and their geopolitical consequences both inside and outside US borders. To do so, I would need to come up with an analytical perspective through which concepts (old and new) could be mobilized to critical effect. Back in 2001–02, I settled on the phrase "tabloid geopolitics" (and its derivatives, such as "tabloid terror," "tabloid realism," and so on) to provide a critical analytical perspective on these pre- and post-9/11 textualities and imageries of terror and war that international relations, geopolitics, and media and cultural studies scholars and students could find helpful in order to disentangle the intricacies of the history of "our" political/cultural present.

As I began writing this book, presented some sections of the chapters at conferences, invited lectures, and colloquia, and submitted some very early drafts of

some chapters for publication in a few academic journals, I benefited greatly from the comments, critiques, and suggestions of many colleagues and friends. At Florida International University (FIU), where I currently teach, I presented an early version of Chapter 1 ("Cyberterror and Media-Induced Fears") at a Symposium on Culture and Politics in the Transnational Polity organized by the Department of International Relations in February 2001. I gave a lecture based on Chapter 2 ("Tabloid Realism and the Reconstruction of American Security Culture") in the context of the Faculty Colloquium Series of the Jack Gordon Institute of Public Policy and Citizenship Studies in April 2002. And I also sought the critical feedback of my departmental colleagues a year later, in April 2003, when I presented to them an early version of Chapter 3 ("Discourses of War, Geographies of Abjection") at the occasion of a Department of International Relations Colloquium. At FIU, I received helpful comments, constant encouragements, and a general sense of intellectual support from several colleagues, in particular Clair Apodaca, John Clark, Damian Fernandez, Harry Gould, Lui Hebron, Gail Hollander, Paul Kowert, Mohiaddin Mesbahi, Rod Neumann, Nick Onuf, Patricia Price, and Lisa Prugl. My gratitude also goes to the College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Provost at FIU whose generous funding over the years allowed me to find the time to conduct research on the project and write several of the chapters. From the College of Arts and Sciences, I obtained a Summer Stipend Award in the summer of 2002. From the Provost's Office, I was granted a one Semester Sabbatical Award in the spring of 2006, which helped me to finish drafting the last two chapters of the book.

Beyond Florida International University, I have had the opportunity to present many versions of the various chapters in this book at several regional, national, and international conferences. There, I benefited from the important feedback of colleagues such as David Blaney, James Der Derian, Kennan Ferguson, Larry George, Kyle Grayson, Nicholas Kiersey, Mark Lacy, Debbie Lisle, Wolfgang Natter, Scott Nelson, Jean-François Thibault, Pablo Toral, Julie Webber, and Geoffrey Whitehall. I owe a special debt to two colleagues, Simon Dalby and Tim Luke, with whom, over the years, I have organized several conference panels on which I got a chance to refine and clarify my arguments for this book. From the moment I came up with the idea of writing a book on the topic of tabloid geopolitics, both Simon and Tim have been tremendous supporters of the project, and their comments (as well as their own work) have helped me to elucidate some analytical, conceptual, and organizational difficulties I encountered in the process of putting the book together. Since 2000, I have also had the privilege to be invited to lecture on diverse aspects of this book by prestigious universities and institutes. I have given presentations at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto (Japan), at the University of Lancaster (United Kingdom), in Tokyo for the Japan Center for Area Studies and the Human Security Studies Project, and at the London School of Economics in the context of the 2005 conference of the journal *Millennium*. I am grateful to the following individuals for inviting me, organizing the lectures, and offering me some invaluable advice on the parts of the book that I had a chance to present to them, their colleagues and their students: Annika Bolden, Douglas Bul-

Introduction

From images of terror to tabloid geopolitics

Being unable to make what is just strong, we have made what is strong just.

Blaise Pascal[1]

[O]nce a nameless and spontaneous reaction has been named and classified, and named over and over again so insistently by all the actors of the public sphere, backed up by thinly veiled threats and intimidation, the name interposes a stereotype between ourselves and our thoughts and feelings;. . . what we feel are no longer our own feelings anymore but someone else's, and indeed, if we are to believe the media, everybody else's.

Fredric Jameson[2]

Primal scenes of terror

Back in October 1993, American military forces received the order from their central command to launch a raid on rebel clan leader Mohammed Farah Aidid's compound in Mogadishu, Somalia. The anticipated overwhelming success of the operation (capturing Aidid, dismantling his network, restoring order to Somalia) would put an end to the in-fighting between rival clans, an internal struggle that had forced the United Nations and later the United States to intervene. Getting rogue clan leader Aidid, dead or alive, had become a priority for the US military command in Somalia and for US President Bill Clinton so that stability could be restored in the region and humanitarian organizations and the United Nations could deploy their peacekeeping and nation rebuilding mission.[3] In the euphoria of the post-Gulf War world, what promised to be a final onslaught against Aidid and his men turned out to be a disastrous mission.[4] But, more importantly, it became one of the most horrendous visual spectacles of the United States' post-Cold War interventionism throughout the 1990s, a sight that would haunt the rest of the decade. As Sidney Blumenthal noted, "within hours, horrifying pictures materialized on television screens: the corpses of American soldiers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu and burned by jubilant crowds, and a bloodied and bruised American hostage reciting his name and job in a monotone terror."[5] American audiences, who were just getting re-accustomed to foreign policy success and scenes

of US triumphalism since the Gulf War victory appeared to have buried once and for all Vietnam's quagmire images, were clearly not prepared for these brutal images of dead and mutilated US soldiers streaming from Somalia. American politicians too were taken by surprise and were left unable to provide an appropriate spin to the visible events. Even Clinton, who up to this point had supported the US interventionist mission in Somalia and backed the strategy of going after Aidid, remained speechless. Again, Blumenthal recalled: "The appearance of a hostage turned Clinton into one himself: it was a picture of impotence and defeat, recalling, without any commentary necessary, the fate of the last Democratic president."[6] At the time, US television networks, starting with CNN, were really not too sure how they should handle those pictures: should they show them again and again, as they had done with the images coming from Baghdad during the Gulf War? Or should they hide them from sight, once and for all?[7] In the hours that followed this failed military assault, both strategies were adopted by the media. The images would eventually be pulled from most US news networks, but they would quickly return, albeit in a still, freeze-frame fashion, as front covers and often color shots in daily newspapers and weekly magazines.[8] In any case, it had been too late: there was no longer any buffering of the public from what had been seen by so many. In fact, the images started to speak for themselves. The US sponsored brave new world (order), championed by George H.W. Bush after the victory over Iraq in 1991 and later reprised by Bill Clinton, had come to an abrupt stop.[9] What were supposed to be the dominant images of the 1990s, the humanitarian decade – images of new American military heroes standing side by side with UN peacekeepers, or often as UN peacekeepers, and paving the way for a more humane and democratic world – suddenly gave way to the vision of tortured American troops, caught in a war that may not have been in America's vital interest to fight. On that day, October 3, 1993, in Mogadishu and hours later in the rest of the world, unexpectedly gruesome images of warfare and military violence interrupted the global flow of humanitarian and interventionist images that had filled TV screens so far, and rendered far less acceptable the political ideologies and military strategies that such a visual flow hoped to legitimize.

Eight years later (give or take a few weeks), another trauma, another set of images, and another American war. Slightly before 9:00 a.m. EST, on September 11, 2001, an American Airlines jetliner collided head-on with one of the World Trade Center towers in New York City's lower Manhattan. Although most Americans did not catch what would later be known as the "first terrorist attack" in real time, fifteen minutes later, as CNN and other cable networks had already dispatched camera crews into the area or on rooftops of buildings in midtown Manhattan, a second airliner slammed into the second World Trade Center tower, impaling the building from one side to the other, and almost immediately unleashing a devastating fireball as the kerosene-filled aircraft exploded inside the tower. Everybody saw that one, even those who had missed the first hit. Everyone who was glued to his/her television screen that morning after the announcement had been made that a first plane had collided with the first tower could not miss that second hit. People at work or on the street were told about it and rushed to the first TV screen they

could find.[10] Although clearly not prepared for the images their cameras would capture that morning, all the major cable news networks made sure they had caught the live scene of the second aircraft hitting the second tower. But reporters and broadcasters were incapable of finding words that could make sense of what we all had just seen.[11] In the hours and days that followed, every American who was not present when the live image jumped onto the screen would be given many more opportunities to revisualize, record, and relive this unfathomable sight, from every possible angle, with accompanying still shots if necessary. Video footage of the first collision that had not been caught live by most TV networks would be hunted down, found, released to the public, and broadcast over and over.

The subsequent endless replay of the initial visual shock was far from surprising. In a sense, this obscene visual rehash was expected, not only because it guaranteed viewership to the networks, but also because it served for many as an emotional relay allowing people to cope with the unreality of the event. Moreover, as Fredric Jameson's opening quotation suggests, the visual repetition of the September 11 attacks, far from being a case of *Schadenfreude* (as with most media coverage of disasters, conflicts, car crashes, poverty, etc.), reflected a desire to name and classify, to organize so as to better rationalize and recuperate. From this perspective, what is interesting, in a way that is also reminiscent of the initial moment of hesitation in the media that followed the images of the tortured US soldiers in Mogadishu, is the virtual silence and absence of commentary and meaning on the part of the media networks as they showed the event live and as the initial hit continued to produce unexpected and cascading visual effects (the collapse of both towers a few hours later, the news of a plane crashing into the Pentagon and another one in a field in Pennsylvania, the false information about bombs exploding near the State Department and the Capitol buildings in Washington, and so on). For a few moments, the image was allowed to roam free, to operate without a name, outside of classifications. It was allowed to speak for itself and splash its disseminated meanings onto people's screens, at home, at work, in the street. Of course, all these meanings were overwhelming and incomprehensible for the public and politicians alike. The media and their talking heads were just as clueless. As James Der Derian remarked: "There was no initial attempt by the media or the government to transform these images of horror into responsible discourses of reflection and action."[12] Of course, comprehension, rationalization, and later revenge would soon take over. But, as suggested above, for these images to be understood, they would need to be replayed over and over until finally some sense of intelligibility could be drawn from them (with the ultimate closing message, pronounced by the President and accepted by the population, that America was at war).[13]

In Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, and in Manhattan on September 11, 2001, a live, incomprehensible image, a moment of terror beyond expectation, calculation, or even despair, an event as event took (its) place in the public sphere, interrupted regularly programmed media representations, and forced a temporary stoppage of public discourses by politicians, pundits, technocrats, pseudo-experts, intellectuals, and ideologues that, for many years, had filled the cultural landscape with

imagined scenarios just like this one (which they nonetheless had not predicted). The image of terror that seems to resist discourse, this event that appears to be able to impose a silence and that postpones what ultimately will return as justifications to go to war, is the reality of what might be called the "primal scene." The term "primal scene" is derived from Marshall Berman's study of Charles Baudelaire's prose poems as critical social tableaux of 1870s Paris.[14] The power of the primal scene is precisely to reveal how "a repressed reality creaks through" even when all seems to be going well for those in the political establishment, for the social elites, for those who are part of the media universe, in a nutshell, for all those for whom control over the meaning of the image and its message appears to have been settled.[15] In this context of cultural and social normalcy, when a certain set of political and economic relations are discursively and, by extension, materially taken to be the way things are, primal scenes can be brutally ironic and destabilizing. They may reveal meaninglessness behind the excesses and flourishes of dominant media representations at a moment when the public is least prepared for such a lack of meaning.

Yet, at the same time as the silent and traumatic reality of the primal scene is about to take its place in our field of vision, perception, and understanding, many non-events rush back in to fill our global mediascape, and they often become the bread and butter of our contemporary dominant and ever-encroaching discursive and public representations. In fact, when the shock and terror of the primal scene finally recede, it is often because media non-events have managed to regain control over the discursive and visual landscape of everyday public/political life. Desirous to stifle the occurrence of the unexpected/unplanned event (and its possibly lasting silence), media productions re-establishing banality and normalcy in public life return to "globally swarm" (to borrow Der Derian's turn of phrase) our daily field of perception and understanding. The goal of such media productions is to not allow us to perceive or experience any reality that has not been previously massaged, manufactured, or operated by the medium itself.

This book seeks to critically detail and untangle the discursive reality of those mediated and mediatized representations, of those textual cultural mediations that talk to the public about all sorts of possible forms of destruction, terrorism, violence, insecurity, and war prior to or with complete disregard for the advent of a primal scene, any primal scene, as if the all-encompassing simulacrum of the media-saturated public sphere was all that could count as cultural, social, and political meaning. In the face of shocking images of beaten-up US soldiers in Mogadishu, of collapsing Twin Towers in New York, or more recently of tortured Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Iraq, these dominant media representations, these authorized public voices, always return full of rationalizations, justifications and, as previously indicated, with ready-made scenarios (often war scenarios) to neutralize whatever fledgling effect the primal scenes might have had on the mesmerized audiences and on their emotions. This book spends much of its time analyzing how these mediated discourses seem to be able to break the silence, to restore and impose meanings where none appears to exist anymore (if only for

a fleeting moment) and, in the context of this search for rationalizations of the image, to give revenge a "name" ("war on terror," for example).

Throughout much of this volume, I refer to these discursive mediations whose buzzing non-events eventually find a way of fending off the reality of the primal scene as a matter of tabloid geopolitics. Tabloid geopolitics is the result of mediatized discursive formations that take advantage of contemporary fears, anxieties, and insecurities to produce certain political and cultural realities and meanings that are presented as commonsensical popular truths about the present condition. Tabloid geopolitics is the form taken by the medium and its discourse, particularly in the United States, in the early twenty-first century in matters regarding national security, the survival of the state (the United States first and foremost), war, and global terror. Tabloid geopolitics is a medium – perhaps *the* medium in matters of international politics and foreign affairs today – but, first of all, it is a discourse. As such, and as will be shown below, all who claim to represent the "public interest" in one form or another, or who pretend to speak in the name of the American public, can and often do partake of it. As will be seen in this study, tabloid geopolitics is a discursive public enterprise that seeks to proliferate narratives and images intended to saturate and satisfy (and satisfy by saturating) the global cultural landscape, or what is left of it. Yet, by hiding deeper and deeper under layers of mediated non-events that are meant to be taken for events (for a reality that can still surprise), these tabloid geopolitical discourses cannot prepare the so-called public, American individuals and perhaps global citizens too, for the tragedy that arrives as or with the primal scene. Instead – and it is as much of a tragedy indeed – tabloid geopolitics ends up deploying vengeful and destructive strategies (and destructive for the global public too, starting with American citizens' lives) against enemies or "evil" figures that, it convinces itself, have to be the real cause of the terror witnessed in the primal scenes. By tracking the courses, recourses, and discourses of tabloid geopolitics, its institutions (in the media often), and its agents/actors, this book offers an account of the tragedy that is and has been "our" condition of global terror from around January 1, 2000 (also known as Y2K), through the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent American wars against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and all the way to the upcoming wars that have yet to/may or may not/will have already come (as non-events) in Iran, for example, or in Lebanon and Israel, or in any other place in the Middle East at about the midpoint of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this first decade of the new century, with "our" public figures' discursive inability or unwillingness to deal with and respond to the images of terror with anything other than many of the same old twentieth-century geopolitical ways of acting (war, political terror, good states versus bad states, and so on) and ways of thinking (aggression, otherness, imperialism, and so forth), "we" once again find ourselves demonstrating Blaise Pascal's point that "we" are indeed only capable of making (and claiming) "what is strong just."

Tabloid culture

Contemporary popular culture is a tabloid or trash culture. It is so in the United States and, by way of what is taken to be globalization, in the rest of the world too. Labeling a culture tabloid or trash is not a pejorative dismissal. It is not a rejection of so-called "everyday lowbrow or middlebrow culture" and its modes of expression, representation, and entertainment on behalf of an allegedly higher, elite, refined or bourgeois culture. Contemporary literatures that talk about tabloid/trash culture recognize this. In many of these literatures, the tabloid status of today's popular cultural productions and consumptions is a descriptive and expository notion that refers to a certain moment or mood in what Jean-François Lyotard (and others) have referred to as the postmodern condition.[16]

The tabloidization of everyday culture takes place when the media and their programming and fictional realities become the all-encompassing dimension of a vast majority of people's daily lives. Although tabloid culture is often associated with the kind of television viewership that developed in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, with talk-shows, "real-life" dramas, and on-the-scene live investigative reporting news, cultural studies scholar Kevin Glynn notes that tabloid culture actually "entails a variety of intertwined discursive formations that occupy a mobile space where journalism and popular culture intersect" and that, as such, "it includes a highly mixed bag of typical forms, thematic concerns, image repertoires, tones of voice, and narrative patterns, many of which are traditional for television but have been reworked in specific and sometimes striking ways."[17] The plurality of messages, the hybridity of forms, and the eclecticism of styles that seem to characterize tabloid TV extend well beyond the television medium and affect many other popular cultural genres that, in the 1990s, increasingly defined themselves against the background of television's upbeat real-time mode of information and entertainment. Thus, from special reports in weekly news magazines to videogames' graphics, from blockbuster films to internet blogs, much of popular culture becomes subject to tabloidization, which, as Glynn mentions, is more to be thought of as a discursive formation (that can evolve through many different forms) than as a specific genre with a single format.[18] The tabloid discourse becomes the dominant mode of communication (between individual beings), representation (of social and political events), expression (of artists, intellectuals, and ideologues), and entertainment (of the overall public) in 1990s postmodern America and later, by extension and through mimesis, in the rest of the world. Tabloid culture fulfills Lyotard's criteria about postmodern culture since its "eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games."[19] In a tabloid postmodern context, the quick, unattached, ever-changeable message that tabloid discursive formations produce offers the public sufficient doses of information, comfort, and often emotions. Or, as trash culture specialist Richard Keller Simon remarks, "[f]or people with inquiring minds but short attention spans, our stories of suffering, fall, and recognition now come in short, easy-to-read fragments as a kind of fast-food tragedy to-go, but

the fragments themselves contain nearly all of the essential elements of dramatic tragedy."[20]

As a discourse, tabloid culture appears to exhibit two main discursive traits or rules of formation: intertextuality and self-referentiality. Intertextuality is the product of the postmodern eclecticism sought in culture in the 1990s and described by Lyotard above. But it is also a trait that has always been characteristic of tabloid presentation, and particularly was closely tied to the tabloid journalism and tabloid newspapers that emerged in the United States in the 1920s. In the 1920s to 1930s, tabloid literatures made up of some pulp novels, snuff stories in popular magazines, and what was often known as yellow journalism caught the public's eye with texts (rarely visuals, with the exception of a few photographs or drawings here and there) whose aim was to sensationalize everyday reality.[21] This textual style of reporting reality or "telling the truth" was popular among the working classes. It made use of bits and pieces of real events gathered from all sorts of narrative sources (news reports printed in national newspapers, political pamphlets, situations depicted in early Hollywood films, common beliefs or anxieties derived from popular folklore, and so on) to create a coherent, believable, and often awe-inspiring or emotion-stirring story that relied on an appearance of truth. Without this intertextuality, this blending of different narrative bits together, the tabloid story would have had to relinquish its claims to veracity and thus would have been indistinguishable from a work of fiction (which it often stylistically mimicked).

The rule of intertextuality already present in 1920s to 1930s tabloid texts and still defining of tabloid culture today, albeit in a blatantly more visual fashion, also guarantees the self-referentiality of this cultural genre. Because the tabloid story is made up of fragments of information collected from very different narrative origins, grounding the produced tabloid report into factual evidence, historical accuracy, or a truth claim is an impossible task. Instead, the tabloid genre creates its own rules of evidence, its own historical events, and its own "truth" as referentiality and meaning are mainly internal to the story itself (which only bears a passing resemblance to so-called real life and soon substitutes itself for it) and its production process. Thus, in today's tabloid culture, tabloid discourses have abandoned any meaningful intention of corresponding to a "real world" outside of the tabloid media world itself. What matters for the tabloid story today is to figure out how "events out there" can be infiltrated into the tabloid universe where they are manipulated, played with, shared between different media actors, replayed, and finally given meaning with an appearance of truth, factuality, and historical accuracy. If one were to use Jean Baudrillard's now famous language, one would have to say that tabloid culture is concerned not with fiction (which seeks only to imitate the truth even when it wishes to imagine an alternate one) but indeed with simulation since the objective is to generate a "reality" that is totally self-referential and yet "more real" than the so-called reality derived from any truth claim.[22] Taking television as today's epitome of the tabloid simulacrum, Glynn presents the self-referentiality of tabloid culture in the following fashion: "television's generic territories . . . constantly play off of, and mutually constitute, one

another, for television's intergeneric universe is fluidly interpenetrating."[23] Glynn then generalizes (beyond television) about tabloid stories by stating that "media texts are always interdiscursive: they are continuously constituted and reconstituted by (and thus dependent on) the shifting relations of meaning that make up the intertextual networks within which they exist."[24]

Although not traditionally interested in producing discourses about politics (and even less about international politics),[25] contemporary tabloid culture finds itself at the heart of many so-called social, political or even economic debates. Since the tabloid cultural turn of the 1990s, "high politics" has been brought down to the level of sensational TV reporting, afternoon talk-shows, information-as-entertainment (or infotainment), documentary-dramas as TV series or even as feature films, and of course internet browsing. Today, "high politics" is filtered to us, the public, the global citizenry, through the simulacrum of tabloid culture. And the social problems that make politics what it is, that give it meaning and purpose (as Murray Edelman would suggest[26]), are presented to the public as a succession of tabloid discourses, often through television and by means of the main media actors, but sometimes also by way of other agents or institutions (many of which still call themselves political in order to be differentiated from the media) that partake of what Jameson once again calls the "public sphere" and are already embedded into the tabloid universe (and as such, whether they like it or not, are part of the tabloid media too). Tabloid culture at the turn of the twenty-first century is ubiquitous and, more importantly, its discursive styles, forms, and apparent modes of content are fashionable and seductive to many – and not just the audiences – because these discursive formations once again present themselves as an endless horizon of human experience. Thus, tabloid culture is always already political or, rather, politics (high or low) is always already a matter of tabloid discursive production, representation, and mediation.

Of late, and particularly since the turn of this century, international politics has become a preferred subject matter of tabloid discourses. There is no doubt that the images of terror of 9/11 (once their primal shock and silence subsided and rationalizations in the media and among politicians took over) played a substantial part in bringing traditional geopolitical issues – war, national security, military defense and strategy, deterrence of terrorism – into the domain of tabloid popular culture. But this new trend was announced a few months prior to the terrorist attacks when the United States and the rest of the world prepared for the global technological, economic, and socio-political catastrophe that was supposed to be Y2K, or the turn to the year 2000. Then already, previewing many of the tabloid media narratives and images that would follow 9/11, issues regarding terrorism, national insecurities, inter-state violence resulting in the destruction of relied upon global networks, and possibly war were the bread and butter of the media's tabloid culture and of all those experts (in government, in computer technology, in insurance matters, and many other sectors) who contributed to the sensationalistic discourse of fear and danger that is often the mark of a successful tabloid story. With Y2K, and even more so after 9/11, the reality of global threats and local dangers became that which tabloid culture produced and reproduced. In the preparations for

what many thought (because it made good sense inside the self-referential tabloid discourse) was going to be Y2K's subsequent terror and chaos, geopolitics was recruited as a prime popular cultural and political topic in the new century.

Geopolitics in a tabloid context

Geopolitics, as John Agnew reminds us, has traditionally been used "to refer to the study of the geographical representations, rhetoric and practices that underpin world politics."[27] Despite the scientific pretense kept up by some initial geopolitical thinkers like Halford Mackinder or Friedrich Ratzel,[28] the study of geopolitics has always been far from objective or value-neutral. On the contrary, geopolitics has historically been tied to the way dominant and powerful sovereign nation-states have tried to make sense of and represent their global spatial environment (starting with their neighboring states) with a view to facilitating their foreign policy making. Thus, geopolitics is closely tied to the idea and practice of territorial and cartographical imagination of modern political forms, starting with the modern state.[29] Historically, it was often through such geopolitical imaginations that subsequent foreign policy, hegemonic, and, sometimes, imperial ambitions were developed.

Crucial to this powerful way of imagining the political world is the belief that power, control, and domination can be spatially pre-determined, territorially engraved and inscribed in texts and, often, in visual forms too. Among the textual and visual materials that become privileged sources of imagination/knowledge for the geopolitical specialist are maps. Geopolitical discourses can "frame world politics in terms of an overarching global context in which states vie for power outside their boundaries, gain control (formally and informally) over less modern regions (and their resources) and overtake other major states in a worldwide pursuit of global primacy."[30] Furthermore, with the assistance of maps, world politics can become "actively spatialized, divided up, labeled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser 'importance' by political geographers, other academics and political leaders."[31] All in all, Agnew concludes, the different methods, approaches to knowledge, and textual and mapping techniques that make up geopolitics as a field of study can be understood as "a *system* of visualizing the world."[32]

The success of this system of political visualization of the world requires that knowledge be produced as a result of reading political texts and consulting geographical maps. Although these writings and cartographical drawings appear to provide geopolitical knowledge, they often merely reproduce and normalize beliefs (about the state, its enemies, its foreign policy objectives) that have already been affirmed by some, generally political leaders, prior to any textual or pictorial inscription. Put differently, geographical categories typically exist before the geopolitical discourse or presentation is unveiled. Susan Schulten's richly documented study of the development of the cartographical industry and imaginary in the United States from the late nineteenth century all the way to World War II reveals that, in the American context, mapmakers and world atlas producers already knew

how they wanted their maps to look and what they wanted their geographical texts to describe and narrate even before the American public had a chance to express preferences or reveal interests. More often than not, those American-made maps and geographical compendia followed closely, in fact anticipated, domestic and international political categories that were meant to serve the United States' global interests or needs. In particular, the newly affirmed international place of the United States as an imperial power (particularly after the Spanish–American war) in the late nineteenth century had to be cartographically explained and justified. Thus, Schulten concludes, as early as the 1880s for the United States (the practice had started earlier in Western Europe), maps, atlases, and their accompanying geopolitical texts "legitimated what was controversial, made scientific what was historical, and naturalized what was human."[33] As a result, what Schulten calls "a metageography" was created that provided American citizens with "a normative view of both the world and the map."[34]

The text and the map, then, become confirmations or verifications of what some (cartographical industrialists, capitalist entrepreneurs, government officials, and so on) already hold to be true, necessary, efficient, and normatively binding. To use Simon Dalby's formulation, "[g]eopolitical reasoning, that is, using geographical categories as part of the practices of representation among foreign policy makers and politicians, specifies the world in particular ways that have political effects."[35] In the process, though, as Dalby further mentions, different and complex social, political, and cultural realities have to be reduced and simplified, often for strategic purposes. Once again, the (geo)political treatise, the atlas, and the map are ideal instruments of simplification and reduction of knowledge, and of further naturalization, extension, and reproduction of such knowledge.

Yet, despite this semblance of simplicity, precision, clarity, and useful transparence, geopolitical discourses and representations are much more complex, hybrid, polymorphous, and pluralized than they appear. Although it would be convenient to limit the production of geopolitical knowledge to a few texts by some political geographers or a few geometric and pictorial drawings by some cartographers, many practices and ideas in society, in everyday culture, partake of the construction of geopolitical imaginaries too. Geopolitics, this allegedly scientific modality of visualization of the world (and generally of the place and role of one or one's chosen state in the world), mobilizes all sorts of live forces in the social and cultural domain that, often unbeknownst to them, are recruited to put their daily activities to good and efficient geopolitical representational use. Gearóid Ó Tuathail's analysis of geopolitics follows this line of reasoning. Examining the turn to geopolitics that took place in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, Ó Tuathail writes:

> It [geopolitics] names not a singularity but a multiplicity, an ensemble of heterogeneous intellectual efforts to think through the geographical dimensions and implications of the transformative effects of changing technologies of transportation, communications, and warfare on the accumulation and exercise of power in the new world order of "closed space." Like other forms

of geo-power, these writings were governmentalized forms of geographical knowledge, imperial rightings from an unquestioned center of judgment that sought to organize and discipline what was increasingly experienced as unitary global space into particularistic regimes of nationalistic, ideological, racial, and civilizational truth. Circulating within the developing media of civil society (which ranged from elite markets for scholarly books to the yellow journalism of jingoistic newspapers), these discourses were motivated attempts to frame the spectacle and flux of the new global political scene within the terms of imperialistic and militaristic agendas, agendas actively cultivated and pushed by political, economic, and bureaucratic interest groups within the states-societies of the Great Powers.[36]

Thus, Ó Tuathail suggests, it is better to understand geopolitics, not just as an elite discourse or representation controlled and produced by a few experts (geographers or others) to achieve calculated political results, but also as an open and pluralized "discursive event" that turns to a rich cultural (often popular cultural) background in the societies where the geopolitical discourse is deployed in order to produce a desired political knowledge.[37] Only by treating geopolitics as what Ó Tuathail calls a "problematic," as that which needs to be problematized, opened up, and untangled (and not as a sealed domain of expert imagination), can one start to appreciate, and perhaps challenge and unsettle, the cultural work that is required to turn a given visualization of the world into a dominant or hegemonic political strategy.

The study of geopolitics, then, can and perhaps ought to start with many public texts and other narratives (and many of them pictorial and visual) that seek to present, affirm, and simplify a political vision of the world. If, as Ó Tuathail intimates, geopolitics is a discursive event and a cultural production, modes of writing and representation used to convey public messages (political or not) are of necessity the media through which the geopolitical discourse circulates. Several critical geopolitical and international relations scholars have already paid much attention to these media or modes of representation that propagate a geopolitical message and perhaps create a certain geopolitical reality. David Campbell's path-breaking study on the politics of identity creation through insecurity and danger has showed how the US government's Cold War foreign policy texts – many of them elite or expert documents (like National Security Council documents), but also others with much intended public effect (like George Kennan's 1946 "Long Telegram" for example) – "established the discursive boundaries of United States foreign policy" around a series of "self versus other" delineations and exclusions.[38] Campbell's genealogy of American foreign policy as national identity reveals a geopolitical imaginary that, from the Puritans' landing to the end of the Cold War, has turned to varied popular cultural narrative sources (Christopher Columbus' own writings and mappings, early settlers' diaries and notebooks, religious pamphlets and jeremiads, political speeches, advertising campaigns, and indeed government documents) to anchor danger and insecurity in (inter)national politics around the idea of "otherness." Michael Shapiro's work of late has also

been driven by a desire to bring to the fore the geopolitical assumptions that can be found in modern and contemporary cultural genres that, from music and painting to photography and film, seem to be far removed from traditional geopolitical questions (but as such, through their "non-political" appearance, display an extremely powerful and lasting force of geopolitical normalization and persuasion).[39]

A few critical minds have even started to think in terms of what they have called "popular geographies" or "popular geopolitics."[40] Joanne Sharp indicates that popular geopolitics, as a problematic (to use Ó Tuathail's terminology), assumes that "there is not a distinct division between elite and popular: elite texts are intended for popular consumption, and members of a distinctively elite institutional locale contribute to and consume popular media."[41] If there is indeed a blending in contemporary society of expert or elite geopolitical texts (National Security Council documents for example) and popular, perhaps even tabloid or trash, cultural literatures and image productions, then the choice of limiting the study of geopolitics to what are typically labeled as official (governmental) sources of geopolitical knowledge would amount to nothing less than a safeguarding of geopolitics as a disciplinary domain inside which sacred and stable political meanings and representations are likely to go unchallenged. Moreover, as Shapiro's work introduced above reveals, ignoring the role and place of popular cultural texts and representations in the making of geopolitics would mean that much of the way discourses of geopolitics manage to establish, normalize, and reproduce foreign policy beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action would go unquestioned and possibly unnoticed. Sharp's own study leads the way in mobilizing popular geopolitics as a problematic by showing how the American middlebrow and direct mail magazine *Reader's Digest* provided American citizens during the Cold War with some of the most influential ready-made explanations (and cartographical depictions) of the Cold War strategies, the Soviet Union, and the "communist enemy." As Sharp notes, "[t]he *Digest*'s geographical imagination links the individual reader to the destiny of the United States, and to the operations of foreign powers, most significantly of course those of the Soviet Union, the Cold War enemy whose character the *Digest* is often credited with helping to create."[42]

As mentioned above, since the year 2000, international political matters typically represented or imagined by geopolitics have found their way into tabloid cultural discourses provided by contemporary media. This has been the case in the United States first and foremost. In the American context, so-called lowbrow or middlebrow publications (like the *TV Guide*, *People's* magazine, *Vanity Fair*, the *National Geographic*, and so forth), daytime talk shows on national television (with iconic TV stars like Oprah Winfrey, but also with newly rising pseudo-psychologists and feel-good gurus like Dr Phil), syndicated radio broadcasts or cable TV networks' "current topics" programs with seemingly straight-shooting, opinionated, and often populist and culturally conservative hosts (like Rush Limbaugh or Don Imus on the radio, or Bill O'Reilly or Pat Buchanan on cable TV) have all made national security, US foreign policy, terrorism, and war some of their primary subjects of concern. These media sources of tabloid discourse have

done their best since 2000 (and probably before too, but with much lower intensity) to represent to American citizens what their world is about, where danger is likely to come from, what cultural posture and possibly political identity they need to adopt, and why often embracing war is the only justifiable way of defending the nation. The images of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 further exacerbated this tendency, particularly after the many journalists, talk-show hosts, pundits, and political experts working on TV or for print media finally found a language to explain what, once again, they had failed to anticipate (the attacks) but could now make sense of.

Thus, the problematic of geopolitics today cannot ignore tabloid culture. If, as Sharp suggests, the geopolitical imaginary of a nation unfolds as a series of cultural interventions that once again she refers to as popular geopolitics, the geopolitical cultural interventions of the early twenty-first century are clearly tabloid. But what is implied in claiming that today's popular geopolitics is necessarily tabloid is not just to suggest that this particular moment or mood in postmodern culture provides contemporary discourses of geopolitics with new cultural vectors through which their political simplifications and normalizations can take place. What the idea of tabloid geopolitics today also signifies, more crucially, is that the intertextual and self-referential tabloid genre of presentation of truth, factual events, and historical accuracy becomes the dominant style of geopolitical discourse. Put differently, whether they work for (tabloid) media or not, all those "actors of the public sphere" – starting with political leaders and going on to policy advisors, technical experts on specific aspects of international politics, and often academics – who write about, speak of, or try to imagine geopolitical realities, particularly in the United States, find themselves producing and reproducing a discourse that is eminently tabloid in both style and content.

Here and throughout the book, I suggest that we need to return to the notion of tabloid culture as a discursive formation. It is common for critical scholarship in the social sciences and humanities to make use of Michel Foucault's notion of discursive formation.[43] In many of these critical literatures, discursive formation is often taken to be synonymous with the term "discourse." Even though both terms are generally used interchangeably, Foucault operated a conceptual distinction between them. In order to grasp the meaning of tabloid geopolitics as a discursive formation whose very task is precisely to produce certain discourses, I believe that it is useful to keep in mind the Foucaultian nuance. For Foucault, discourse (often used by him where others would speak of language[44]) is anything that can be and is said, or written, or represented by someone or some institution with or without a specified objective. A discursive formation is a principle or technique of organization, calculation, arrangement, or redistribution of discourse or language.[45] Thus, discursive formations are interventions, directions, or specifications at the level of discourse/language with a view to attaining or realizing certain preferred meanings or representations.[46] Although thinking tabloid culture (as Glynn did above) and tabloid geopolitics (as I do here) as discursive formations places an emphasis on the methods, techniques, and textual or visual tricks that are deployed by those who wish to mobilize or use cultural or political discourses to achieve a certain

type of knowledge (and, by the same token, try to negate other ways of producing meaning), this approach nonetheless does not ignore the specific formats or media through which these discourse-knowledge practices are operating. But this critical way of thinking and analyzing geopolitics and tabloid culture still recognizes that the produced tabloid discourse is more than the discourse of specific tabloid media that have embarked upon a sensationalistic style of information and so-called truth-telling. As a discursive formation, tabloid geopolitics is a generalized modality of knowledge production in today's culture, and the discourse of tabloid geopolitics can thus be created, transmitted, redirected, recycled, appropriated, and proliferated by a wide variety of public actors who find a utility (and often derive much power) in the operationalization of this discourse's truth- and knowledge-effects. Thus, the fashionable debate that is still ongoing in media studies and cultural studies today over whether the form (or the medium) should matter more than the content (or the message) in the determination of meaning and/or truth needs to be transcended and perhaps forgotten altogether. In the case of tabloid cultural and geopolitical discourses, both form and content matter. But they matter not so much because one can influence social or political meaning more than the other, but because both together, hand in hand, are necessary instruments in the making of a story or reality that, as explained above, must have the appearance of truth. Inside the discursive formation that is tabloid geopolitics, both content (what is actually said or shown) and form (what sort of media intervene to reveal some kind of reality) work together to intertextually and self-referentially generate truth-effects that will catch people's attentions, play with their emotions, and often become the main sources of what many consider to be the materiality of everyday politics.

In the ever-expanding media universe – a conceptual as much as technical domain whose limits tabloid culture keeps on expanding by bringing more and more public actors into the mix as media consultants, information providers, pundits, or truth-tellers – the discourse of tabloid geopolitics provides people in the United States and throughout the world with explanations, rationalizations, and predictions about events, images, or scenes (often primal scenes of terror) that can now make geopolitical sense. In a cultural context where the distinction between being inside actual media forms or networks or outside them no longer matters because it is no longer possible to ascertain what is part of the mediascape and what is not, the popular geopolitical discourse of the tabloid simulacrum is still an important cultural and social discourse, one that is loaded with powerful political effects. Whether it emanates from a Fox News special investigative report on the US war in Iraq, for example, or from a geopolitical treatise about America's post-9/11 security strategies provided by famous contemporary intellectuals of statecraft like Robert D. Kaplan, Samuel Huntington, or Victor Davis Hanson, whose books and op-ed pieces openly mimic a tabloid style of imagination and visualization of world political realities, the discourse of tabloid geopolitics seeks to generate some meanings and truths in (inter)national politics by sensationalizing and spectacularizing world politics at all costs.[47] Often recognizable because of the language and imagery of fear, danger, and destruction that they typically

mobilize, geopolitical "issues and problems" introduced by tabloid geopolitical agents (media networks or intellectuals and academics of statecraft) are depicted in such a fashion that it now appears to the public that these so-called geopolitical problems can only be solved by means of military violence. Not coincidentally, the military violence privileged and offered as a logical outcome by most tabloid geopolitical discourses is that which a few states only, starting with the United States, have been deemed capable, willing, and justified to wield.

Tabloid geopolitics before and after 9/11

In this book, I examine the representations of security, terror, and war that have been provided by tabloid discourses as new "geopolitical truths" since the beginning of the twenty-first century. By once again treating tabloid geopolitics as a discursive formation, I pay close attention to the interventions at the level of narrative productions (both textual and visual) that have been performed by tabloid actors – media networks and intellectuals of statecraft above all – to control meaning and achieve desirable political effects. In so doing, and as I intimated earlier, I suggest that both media networks and intellectuals of statecraft are part of the same discursive regime, that they mutually refer to and reinforce one another, and that they work in complicity (although not always consciously) to build upon and embellish the tabloid geopolitical story. Empirically, it may at times appear that this book is about neo-conservative intellectuals, pundits, or academics and their narrative strategies aimed at redirecting the American foreign policy agenda toward going to war in order to fight terrorism and combat states that have been deemed to be enemies of the United States, both before and after 9/11. Although this primary level of reading is possible, it is clearly not the only and certainly not the main intended objective of the book.[48] American neo-conservative intellectual and polemical perspectives on US foreign policy since the year 2000 matter here, but they matter to the extent that they partake of, contribute to, and, in a sense, shape the contours of the public intellectual and political universe within which tabloid geopolitical discourses are allowed (and probably encouraged) to thrive.[49] Thus, more broadly, this study is interested in exploring, making sense of, and finally problematizing the discursivities (neo-conservative or otherwise) at work in the current, mostly American, geopolitics of security, terror, and war. By approaching the contemporary tabloid geopolitical discourse as what Ó Tuathail has called a "problematic" as opposed to reducing the so-called problem to neo-conservative ideology only, this discourse can now be opened up, untangled, pluralized, criticized, and, hopefully, publicly challenged too.

The book follows a rather chronological progression, starting with the months prior to Y2K and going to roughly the end of the year 2005 and early 2006, a time when a beginning of pluralization and uncertainty seemed to be able to creep into the dominant tabloid geopolitical discourse as the spectral images of 9/11 receded a bit, states other than the United States could now bear the mantle of moral outrage and political resoluteness against al Qaeda and in the context of the "war on terror" because they too had been attacked (Spain and Great Britain

in particular), the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were increasingly revealed as quagmire scenarios (with exit strategies starting to be visible), and Iran was increasingly presented as a new, perhaps more insurmountable, threat to America's war against terror. Still, since this book spans a short time period (some five to six years), chronology or historical succession is not so crucial to reading and understanding the following chapters.

Chapter 1 takes us back to the months that preceded the turn to the year 2000. In a context dominated by public fears about computer collapses, network shutdowns, and cyberterrorist hacking, information and digital technologies were perceived to be the main sources of (inter)national insecurity and possibly terror. This chapter develops the analysis of tabloid geopolitics before 9/11, at a time when Y2K was the main acronym and code name for danger and anxiety, by focusing on some cable news networks' programs that came up with catastrophic scenarios in order to, as they claimed, better prepare the public for the chaos that might spread just minutes after midnight on January 1, 2000. In many ways, both in the discourses produced by new types of public intellectuals and media pundits used as experts on the Y2K (non-)event and in the rise to prominence of new media actors (the internet, Fox News, and so on), the seeds were planted for tabloid geopolitics and its mode of imagination of the world. Chapter 2 examines how, in the months or even years before the attacks of September 11, 2001, a tabloid geopolitical discourse had already emerged. Mobilized by intellectuals or academics desirous to influence the course of American foreign policy making at the end of the 1990s, this discourse first focused on an attempt at restoring political realism since it had been argued by some, in international relations theory circles in particular, that the end of the Cold War had marked the demise of realism.[50] Realism's emphasis on national security, defense, containment, deterrence, and military might became crucial to this revived (tabloid) realist discourse. This reconstruction of American security culture took place, up to 9/11, by means of a political and cultural strategy that, in this chapter, I call "tabloid realism." In many ways, tabloid realism is the immediate precursor to the more generalized geopolitical discourse of tabloid terror that comes into full effect in the fall of 2001.

Chapter 3 offers a critical reflection on the meaning of the sentiments of revenge, rage, hatred, but also fear felt in the United States in the months that followed the terrorist attacks in New York and at the Pentagon. This chapter highlights how the need for the United States to move away from a post-9/11 sense of despair justifies the passage, in tabloid culture and politics, from tabloid realism to a full-blown tabloid discourse of war and abjection. Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject is an important critical filter that I use here to try to make sense of the language and imagery of retaliation, hatred, and destruction employed and championed by many American intellectuals of statecraft to justify why America must be at war and constantly be found fighting new forms of "evil" after 9/11.[51] In this chapter, the war in Afghanistan initiated by the United States in October–November 2001 is the contextual backdrop for much of this abject (and abjectifying) tabloid discourse. Kristeva's theory of abjection – an elaboration and extension of prior theories about desire, identity, and disgust[52] – is also crucial because it

pushes us to notice the cultural, social, and ideological consequences of tabloid geopolitical discourses (such as those deployed in the United States in the fall of 2001). In this sense, Chapter 3 operates a transition in the book from an analysis of the narratives that produce tabloid terror to the effects of such discourses in terms of the cultural, social, and ideological imposition and normalization of war, destruction, and death as acceptable everyday realities.

Chapter 4 continues the analysis of the representations and discourses of war and terror found in (mostly American) tabloid geopolitical circles after 9/11 with a more direct focus on the consequences of such narratives and images (as indicated above). Here, the emphasis is on the institutionalization of war and war-making (or what I take to be a certain dimension of agonal politics) as ready-made realities of American public life and culture in the first decade of the new century. In this context, the US invasion of Iraq in March–April 2003 forms the empirical and political backdrop of this chapter. In Chapter 4, the interplay between everyday culture and American war-making is key. Popular cultural productions (advertising campaigns by the US Army), personal narratives (the autobiography by General Tommy Franks, the main military commander of the war in Iraq), and pseudo-academic or scholarly tabloid pamphlets and studies by American conservative pundits and intellectuals like Samuel Huntington or Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol are brought together into the text in order to arrive at a theoretical reconsideration of the relationship between sovereignty and war in an era when absolute warfare is normalized by tabloid discourses. In this chapter, the effects of tabloid geopolitics on the political are directly addressed, and I conclude that the relinquishing of total authority to the American war machine (in Iraq above all) advocated by tabloid texts and images gives rise to a new conceptualization of sovereignty (what I call "agonal sovereignty") that, far from being concerned with the protection of the institutions of the state or even with preserving a certain way of life, is only interested in constantly finding new enemies, whoever they may be, and fighting new wars, wherever they may take place.

As Chapter 3's turn to Kristeva and abjection already announced, part of the analysis of Chapter 4 also starts to engage contemporary (often French) post-structural and critical theories. In this chapter, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the war machine is mobilized, and recent critical and post-Foucaultian interventions about biopolitics and the state of exception are introduced too. As the following chapters will confirm, post-structural theories and writings – and their close attention and dedication to language and to the textual production of identity – still have much to offer. In particular, mobilizing post-structural writings allows one to enable ruptures of commonsense and introduce suspensions of imposed meaning inside contemporary public/political culture where representations of and identifications with terror, war, and destruction all too often prevail. Thus, I object to Rey Chow's recent argument that suggests that the "self-referentiality of poststructuralist theory" dooms it to be of very little practical and critical relevance in contemporary culture and politics.[53] On the contrary, I hope to demonstrate in Chapter 4 and in the subsequent chapters that post-structurally influenced critical thinking (from various and varied scholars such as Deleuze and

Guattari, Foucault, or Giorgio Agamben in Chapter 4; from Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy in Chapter 5; and from Emmanuel Levinas and Judith Butler in the conclusion) more than ever needs to be studied closely, articulated, worked upon, and elaborated, especially if one cares to try to restore a cultural and political way of life and a public sphere of discussion and debate where difference is not automatically excised in the name of larger-than-life demands to defeat terrorism, fight evil, or destroy ever newly created enemies in whatever future war appears to be on the horizon.

Chapter 5 returns to the spectacle of terror, destruction, and war that was presented at the onset of this introduction. It does so in order to force a critical examination of the connection between tabloid geopolitical discourses of war and terror and the notion of the sublime. Benefiting from the assistance of texts and concepts derived from the thoughts of political philosophers like Kant, Lyotard, Nancy, and Derrida, this chapter seeks to place the meaning of the tabloid geopolitical discourses and representations of the Iraq war and its aftermath of guerrilla warfare, local resistance to US occupation, tortured Iraqi prisoners, and growing anti-war sentiments in the United States in the larger perspective of the relationship between sublime visual representations and the justification for violence. As a manifestly visual (through actual visual media) or imagined (through tabloid intellectuals' texts with high imaginary appeal) mode of production of geopolitical realities, tabloid geopolitics, in Iraq and beyond, bears a fundamental responsibility for the deployment of extremely violent ways of thinking, viewing, and practicing international politics today.

The conclusion to the book pulls together some reflections on the power and purpose of tabloid geopolitics and its production of tabloid terror by bringing the critical focus more closely toward the end of the year 2005 and early 2006, a time when (as suggested above) uncertainty may have started to creep up in apparently unchallenged and unchallengeable tabloid geopolitical representations. This concluding chapter "updates" the tabloid geopolitical debate and discourse of some contemporary (often imperialist) intellectuals of statecraft, and it contrasts their writings and presentations to the critically persuasive analysis provided by Judith Butler. Using Butler's recent argument about the production and representation of violence in the public sphere and its meaning for identity, human vulnerability, and life in general,[54] I suggest in this concluding chapter that one form of resistance to the violence and war normalized inside tabloid discourses is to find ways of rescuing the event from the tabloid production, of thinking the political outside of the dominant discourses, representations, and mediations of (inter)national politics (an argument already anticipated at the end of Chapter 5).[55] As was postulated at the beginning of this introduction, and as recent post-structurally influenced contributions to critical thinking (such as Butler's) have been eager to point out, this attempt at liberating the event may entail a return to the image of terror, to the primal scene, not so much because terror, any terror, is to be praised as such (in fact, quite the contrary), but because the silence or lack of rationalization that accompanies such a scene or event may have a chance of breaking the cycle of tabloid geopolitical discourses that continue to propagate war and, in so doing, are also responsible for keeping the terror alive.