ATLANTIC JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION, 13(2), 57–72
Copyright © 2005, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Separated at Birth: Argument by Irony in *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*

Carol Wilder
Department of Media Studies & Film
The New School

Political documentaries *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* were made three decades apart and stand as cultural markers of their times. The films share remarkable similarities and equally important differences. *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* include many similar iconic images of antiwar rhetoric, including grieving parents, profiteering businessmen, dissembling politicians, and wounded warriors. They have similar distribution histories. Conceptually, both films construct cinematic argument through an intricate succession of incongruous, contradictory, and ultimately ironic words and images. This article explores argument by irony as exemplified by *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and discusses their dissimilarities as manifestations of the radically differentiated media environments of their times.

"Throughout the war in Vietnam, the United States has exercised a degree of restraint unprecedented in the annals of war."

—Richard Nixon in *Hearts and Minds* (1974)

"The care that goes into targeting [in Iraq] is impressive as anyone can see. The care that goes into it—the humanity that goes into it."

—Donald Rumsfeld in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004)

It is a riveting political documentary that won raves at the Cannes Film Festival, was dropped by its original distributor, met with passionately opposing reviews, and was a leading contender for an Academy Award. Is it Michael Moore's 2004 *Fahr-*

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Carol Wilder, Department of Media Studies & Film, The New School, 70 Fifth Avenue, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10011. E-mail: wilderc@newschool.edu

enheit 9/11? Yes, of course, but the description is equally true of Peter Davis's 1974 anti-Vietnam War documentary *Hearts and Minds*. These two documentaries made three decades apart are political markers of their moment. No 30 years in history has encompassed such extraordinary change in media, culture, and political discourse. What can the striking similarities and differences of these pictures tell us about the media environments of their respective times? What can they reveal about the architecture of effective cinematic argument, about the eternal verities of war rhetoric?

The logic of both *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* builds through the composition of an intricate succession of incongruous, contradictory, and ultimately ironic words and images. The cumulative effect of carefully juxtaposed sounds and pictures provides the structure of an argument from antithesis, where the adjacency of contradictory or incongruous messages creates a dialectical tension that propels the audience to a resolution. From at least the time of Heraclitus, forms of opposition ("contraries," in his case) have provided a fundamental framework for analysis. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ca. 86 B. C. E.; 1968), Cicero described the use of antithesis (*contentio*) as a figure of both thought and style. Hegel (2004) made a lasting mark on both philosophy and politics with a dialectical model usually characterized as thesis-antithesis-synthesis. And in the last century, Gregory Bateson's (1972) double bind theory was part of a revolution of psychotherapeutic practice. Decades of clinical experience and experimentation with double binds, hypnotherapy, brainwashing, and even Zen practice show that although mixed messages can harm or heal, in either case, they actively engage the viewer, hearer, or reader in the construction of meaning in a way that unambiguous messages do not (Wilder & Collins, 1994). Audience members are prompted to create a synthesis that positions them as partners in sense-making. Both *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* exemplify a pattern of ironic juxtaposition that is central to the filmmaker's strategy.

At the same time, *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* are quintessential examples of changing media practices. Peter Davis (1974) went out of his way to communicate gravitas and stay out of his movie. Michael Moore went out of his way to get "in" the way to inject both humor and himself at every opportunity, unabashedly working toward his ultimately unsuccessful goal of unseating George W. Bush. The guiding hand of *Hearts and Minds* is an invisible narrator emanating from the precision of the editing itself. The guiding hand (and voice) of *Fahrenheit 9/11* belong (literally) to the filmmaker. But in both films, the narration—invisible or overt; voiceless or voiceover—builds the argument through a steady stream of ironies and contradictions that lead the viewer inexorably toward the synthesis that is the filmmaker's preordained audience destination. Further, the stories of both *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* lead to some broader observations about the vanishing border between the truth claims and production values of news and entertainment.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

> "...So we must be ready to fight in Vietnam, but ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and minds of the people that actually live out there."
>
> —Lyndon Johnson in *Hearts and Minds* (1974)

The release of the *Hearts and Minds* DVD in 2002, a year of escalating warfare and uncertainty, brought renewed attention to this classic work even before another Vietnam-related documentary, *The Fog of War*, received the 2003 Academy Award for Errol Morris, and *Fahrenheit 9/11* became an election year phenomenon in 2004. Director Davis provided extensive commentary and context for *Hearts and Minds* on the Criterion Collection DVD (2002), distilling the perspective of three decades and providing important background for this analysis. Additional background information is from personal communication with Peter Davis on November 16, 2002.

To the surprise of many, the 1975 Academy Award for documentary feature went to producer Bert Schneider and director Davis for their account of what Americans did "out there" in Vietnam, and "what the doing did back." *Hearts and Minds* created its own sensation on release in a United States bitterly divided about a bloody conflict in a distant land. By making *Hearts and Minds*, Davis wanted to ask the following: "Why did we go to Vietnam? What did we do there? What did the doing do to us?" Davis wrote in the 2002 DVD liner notes, "if the first casualty of war is truth, the last is memory." Can a new look at an old movie shed light on this dark time?

"FIRST AN UNDECLARED WAR, THEN AN UNSEEN FILM"

It was a fluke that *Hearts and Minds* was made at all. Hollywood was no more eager in the 1970s than it is today to bankroll political controversy. Nonetheless, Bert Schneider made so much money for Columbia with *Easy Rider* and *Five Easy Pieces* that the studio gave him a big budget with no strings. Schneider turned around and gave a million dollars, no strings, to CBS documentary producer Peter Davis, best known at that time for *Hunger in America* and the controversial Emmy-winning 1971 *Selling of the Pentagon*. Work on *Hearts and Minds* began in 1972, owing much to ground broken by Emile deAntonio's *Vietnam: In the Year of the Pig* (1968), the first full-length commercial Vietnam documentary by an American filmmaker. (Davis's cinematographer Richard Pearce and editor Lynzee Klingman both worked on the deAntonio film.)

Pearce and Davis shot more than 200 hours of film both across the United States and in Vietnam, acquiring 20 hours more of stock footage. Davis accumu-

lated 1,200 pages of notes on the dailies alone, eventually wrestling the film to just under 2 hours. In April 1974, an incomplete version was screened for Columbia lawyers and other front office personnel. Two hours after the screening, Columbia Executive Vice President David Begelman called Schneider to say that Columbia was in "precarious financial condition" and was "fearful of reprisals from bankers" (Harrington, 1975, p. 17). This despite the fact that Schneider had 5 million dollars of liability insurance on *Hearts and Minds* in addition to Columbia's 20 million dollars of general coverage. An additional 25 million dollars acquired by BBS did not change things. Lamented Stephanie Harrington, "first an undeclared war, then an unseen film" (1975, p.1).

Over Columbia's objections, in May 1974 Schneider screened *Hearts and Minds* to a wildly receptive Cannes audience. Columbia was unmoved and continued to stall, in what Harrington called "a Rashomon of a tale of—depending upon one's viewpoint—exaggerated corporate cautiousness, financial cowardice bordering on informal political censorship, or, as Columbia prefers it, simple business prudence" (1975, p.1). Nonetheless, *Hearts and Minds* met with rave receptions and reviews at festivals and screenings throughout the summer and fall of 1974, but Columbia continued to balk at distributing the picture and refused to sell it to someone who would. Finally, Schneider and Davis managed to buy the film from Columbia and make a distribution deal with Warner Brothers. *Hearts and Minds* was thus able to have a brief commercial run in December 1974 to be eligible for the Academy Awards. At last, just as the film was set to go into general distribution, Vietnam War architect Walt Rostow won a temporary restraining order to block it as an "unauthorized commercial exploitation of his image and likeness" (Turran, 1975, p. 38). Rostow's bid for a permanent injunction was denied, and on January 22, 1975, *Hearts and Minds* opened its first run in Washington, DC at an evening sponsored by George McGovern and other antiwar notables.

MIXED MESSAGES

Reviews were mixed. *Hearts and Minds* was "the truth of the matter" (Francis Fitzgerald, in Harrington, 1975, p. 1), "propaganda" (Walter Goodman, 1975, p. 15), "a cinematic lie" (M. J. Sobran, 1975, p. 621). Vincent Canby wrote in the *New York Times* that it "may well be the true film for America's bicentennial" (1975, p. 38). Andrew Kopkind called it "brave and brilliant" (1975, p. 44); John Simon declared it "certainly the most significant and probably the best of all recent films" (1975, p. 72). Writing in *Film Quarterly*, Bernard Weiner concluded that *Hearts and Minds* is "a supremely important political film" (1974, p. 63).

Other reviewers were less enthusiastic. The film was morbid, one-sided, manipulative. There were no "bad" Vietnamese, no prowar Americans who do not sound like idiots or worse, and there was too much emotional pandering. Stefan Kanfer charged in *Time* that "beginning with the noblest of motives—examination of the

roots and consequences of the Vietnam War—this vigorous, chaotic documentary manipulates time for its own ends" (Kanfer, retrieved in 2005). *Hearts and Minds* "cannot leave hell enough alone" (Kanfer, 1975).

Controversy notwithstanding, in March 1975 *Hearts and Minds* won its Oscar. Schneider's acceptance remarks included reading a cable from the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam's Ambassador to the Paris peace talks. This so upset host Bob Hope that he had Frank Sinatra read a statement disclaiming responsibility for any political references. Even in 1975, the year the Vietnam War officially ended, America was confused, angry, and divided about its meaning. Vietnam was the first "television war," having started about the time the networks began 30-minute nightly news broadcasts (1963) and continuing through television's switch from black and white to color transmission (1967). *Hearts and Minds* was not the only film about Vietnam in this television-dominated environment, but it was the only documentary that went into general distribution and received a wide audience.

"FIRST THEY BOMB, THEN THEY FILM"

Penelope Gilliatt (1975, p. 120) wrote that you can throw all the pieces of *Hearts and Minds* randomly up in the air and they will come down with the same story. Perhaps at first look, but on closer examination, the film comes into focus as a meticulously rendered archetype of editing built through a choreographed progression of antithetical messages. When this device is used repeatedly, as it is in *Hearts and Minds*, it prompts the viewer to project an invisible narrator whose function is to make meaning through resolving the dilemma. In *Hearts and Minds*, this narration is punctuated by recurring bits of interviews that form a latticework of context. If the viewer has not known what to make of the mixed messages, the unambiguousness of the interviews speaks clearly for the intentions of the filmmaker.

Hearts and Minds, atypically for its time, includes extensive images of Vietnamese civilians going about daily life, images that were little seen in the U.S. mainstream media. (*LIFE* magazine probably did the best job of this.) Davis is a knowing everyman, able to see the tragic story in wide angle. Vietnam War television reporting did not effectively convey the killing in human terms, especially when the dead were Vietnamese. *Hearts and Minds* captures the unconscious racism of war, and the naïve belief that the United States could wage a technological war against people who were faceless. Peter Davis gives them faces. Despite the fact that the film was released nearly 10 years into the American War in Vietnam and shortly before the war's end, representations of civilian Vietnamese people and life were uncommon in American media, much like Iraqi or Afghani life has been absent today. Davis found one place in particular, "Hung Dinh Village, North of Saigon," to anchor his story and personalize the Vietnamese.

The "Vietnamese Other" is most powerfully etched in a sequence of mourning and keening at the National Cemetery of South Vietnam. The funeral is for a South Vietnamese soldier, and is presented in all its ritual, dignity, and grief. A scene of unbearable suffering of a young boy who throws himself on the casket leads the viewer to share a painful and intimate moment. For the most part throughout the film, the Vietnamese are portrayed as sympathetic victims, even in a notorious and graphic brothel scene. As a result, an ancient complex culture is simplified and romanticized, but nonetheless made human.

Hearts and Minds is replete with archival footage of some of the war's most gruesome images. These images are almost as recognizable today as they were then: GIs using Zippo lighters to torch huts at Cam Ne as reported by Morley Safer; Nick Ut's photo of naked napalmed Phan Thi Kim Phuc running toward the camera in terror; Eddie Adams's capture of a point blank execution on a Saigon street. Each one of these images was widely distributed by mainstream media and each encapsulated the essential horror of the war. In *Hearts and Minds*, not only are these arresting pictures included, but the moving image brings to life the more familiar still image, playing out the action to greater effect in what seems like slow motion. The still image of the execution on the Saigon street during the Tet offensive shows the moment of the bullet's impact, but the full film shot shows the victim fall on his side, spewing a fountain of blood from his ear. It is much grislier than even Adams's Pulitzer prize-winning still image, and more graphic than nearly any photograph coming out of Iraq or Afghanistan today. The explicit war photography that was a signature media feature of the Vietnam War has not been seen since in the United States, with exceptions proving the rule: dead American soldiers being dragged in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993; burned, mutilated, and hanged Americans in Iraq in 2003. After Vietnam, noted Pete Hamill, who reported that war, "the press in general and photographers in particular, were never as free to cover American wars" (2004, p. A15).

Peter Davis was influenced by the verite documentary style developed in the 1950s and 1960s by Frederick Wiseman, D. A. Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, and others. *Hearts and Minds* is shot largely in television documentary style, but in a departure from television format, Davis rejected the use of a narrator. The more eloquent the narrator, the less the viewer feels the suffering. In the director's commentary on the *Hearts and Minds* DVD, Davis noted that be wanted to remove the curtain provided by the narrator, and at the same time avoid "pounding a conclusion" (2002).

If *Hearts and Minds* has a grammar, the interviews are its conjunctions. Davis cuts his subjects so that they collectively tell the story, "wounded voices running like insistent snatches of songs," in the words of Andrew Kopkind (1975, p. 44). The interviews are dispersed strategically throughout the film, resulting in the creation of a cohesive context that allows the viewer to weave hundreds of contradictory, complex, chaotic, and often disturbing images into the whole cloth of Davis's cinematic agenda.

Hearts and Minds presents a depressing array of official sources whose positions should virtually stand for credibility, but whose words and deeds communicate the opposite. (Clark Clifford being a notable exception.) A parade of presidential naiveté and deception includes clips from Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. Richard Nixon's statement is especially arresting: "Throughout the war in Vietnam, the United States has exercised a degree of restraint unprecedented in the annals of war." The audacity of this claim in reference to a war where more bombs were dropped than in all previous wars combined sets the tone of U.S. government denial and duplicity that mobilizes the viewer for the story that follows. In stark contrast to official mendacity stand Davis's interviews with the film's wounded warriors: Robert Muller, William Marshall, Randy Floyd, and Stan Holder, all visibly in physical and emotional pain. Pilot Randy Floyd breaks down. Bobby Muller appears in the film several times, and it is not until midmovie that the camera pulls back from a medium shot to reveal that Muller is in a wheelchair. Marshall, a double amputee, is shot in a similar way.

The most contested scene in *Hearts and Minds* depicts Davis's interview of General William Westmoreland, who says with a sense of comfortable entitlement: "Well, the Oriental does not put the same high price on life as the Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient. And as the philosophy of the Orient expresses it, life is not important." Davis (on the DVD) claims that Westmoreland made the now-infamous statement not once, but three times. In response to criticism for juxtaposing that scene next to the Vietnamese funeral, Davis insists that no matter where the footage was placed, it "detonated" all the footage around it. Given the contribution of this moment to the film's impact, Davis could not have constructed written narration that speaks more forcefully. The highest ranking soldier saying the most cynical racist thing in the most matter-of-fact way captures the soul of *Hearts and Minds* more any other single moment.

Film editor Walter Murch told Michael Ondaatje that when film editing works, it

> identifies and exploits underlying patterns of sound and image that are not obvious on the surface. Putting a film together is, in an ideal sense, the orchestrating of all those patterns, just like different musical themes are orchestrated in a symphony. (Ondaatje, 2002, p. 10)

Davis orchestrates his own symphony in *Hearts and Minds* by building a composition of argument by antithesis that involves the viewer in an active process of making meaning. Time and again, one message is placed near its opposite, with the viewer left to draw the conclusion. In the collage style pioneered by deAntonio, Davis meticulously positions all the bits and pieces. Judith Crist called this the filmmaker's "point counter-point technique" (DVD liner notes, 2002), but there is more to it than simply lining up mixed messages. It is the multiple ways in which

Davis creates a pattern of contradictions and conjunctions that give the film its depth and dimensionality.

The opening sequence of *Hearts and Minds* is paradigmatic of the contrapuntal structures Davis builds throughout. In rich hues, a horse-drawn cart crosses the screen, bells tinkling softly. The camera pulls back slowly to a wider shot of village life. "Hung Dinh Village, North of Saigon" reads the subtitle. Children run laughing with their schoolbooks. Women gather straw, first in close-up and then from afar. Against a backdrop of six women minding their work, an American soldier enters from the right of the frame and saunters slowly across. The women seem not to notice, but to the viewer it is a jarring intervention. What is wrong with this picture? The soldier does not belong there. There is another shot of two GIs walking away from the camera, weapons at ease. Barely 1 minute into the film the entire story has been foreshadowed. We know that these incongruous images are going to collide. We know the unhappy ending, and the tension created by this initial contradiction propels the viewer ahead with a morbid fascination.

For filmmaker Davis, in *Hearts and Minds*, irony is not so much an attitude as it is an editing strategy. As in the Hung Dinh sequence, picture can contradict picture over a time-base of several shots (just as sound can contradict sound), or picture and sound can point–counterpoint in either synchronous or asynchronous patterns. Typically one message is clearly intended to be meta to the other and thus governs the construction of meaning, and with repetition over time, a matrix of contradictions forms a web from which the viewer cannot easily escape. Some juxtapositions are straightforward, as when Rostow says, "Ho Chi Minh in '56, I don't think could have gotten elected dog catcher in Vietnam," followed by Daniel Ellsberg saying; "Ho Chi Minh dead could beat any candidate we've ever put up in Vietnam." At several dramatic times, Davis uses silence to punctuate a scene, doubly accentuating the image.

One sequence that embraces all of these forms is an adrenaline pumping series of 25 shots that starts with a huge roaring and rising B-52 shimmering with heat and ends in the shattered village of Hung Dinh. The sequence is an essay in itself; a reverberating film within the film. From the B-52, more fighter planes follow. Two American fliers provide voiceover. Randy Floyd says: making a bombing run "can be described as a singer doing an aria...it was very much a technical expertise thing...." There is quick cutting between Floyd, war planes, and George Coker, who says: "You're up there doing something that mankind has only dreamed of...It's definitely the ultimate in aviation." The film then cuts to the village, and the incongruity builds. Floyd talking about "the thrill you get when you see something explode" is voiced over a group of laughing Vietnamese children. Coker says the following: "to say it's thrilling—yes—it's deeply satisfying." The film then cuts to many bombs exploding, then pans from planes in the air to the villager on the ground who says: "The planes again...first they bomb, then they film."

This sequence is so abundant with ironic adjacencies—picture next to picture, sound next to sound, sound over picture from same or previous shot, and so forth—that it could be scored with musical notation. Davis is unrelenting. A sequence with a dead soldier's parents follows; then a bloodlust sequence featuring George Patton III, some of the film's several football analogies, the brothel scene, and some examples of racism, leading the viewer to the climactic 1968 Tet offensive. The tone shifts as American public opinion shifted, and Robert Kennedy, Daniel Ellsberg, and others make antiwar statements. Lyndon B. Johnson announces he won't run. We see for the first time that William Marshall is an amputee and Bobby Muller is in a wheelchair.

Too much is not enough. The upbeat World War II song "Over There" plays over scenes of a burning village and tortured prisoners. Bob Hope makes jokes at a White House dinner for American POWs, juxtaposed with shots of more bombs, a hospital in rubble, dead children. In the end, Davis's most powerful and controversial juxtaposition is between the long wrenching funeral scene followed by Westmoreland's infamous statement. Davis has also been criticized for his editing of a conversation with Walt Rostow, which certainly has at least the appearance of being manipulative as Davis appears to bait his interview subject. Davis was inevitably accused of creating "propaganda" with scenes like this, despite the fact that he was schooled in what could be called the CBS School of Television Documentary, where journalistic standards and practices were taken most seriously. Davis did some hard-hitting pieces, but kept his distance from the subject in deference to prevailing norms of journalism, becoming one of the most respected investigative documentarians of his era. Fast forward to 2004, and Peter Davis appears in retrospect a model of the quaint antiseptic journalism of a bygone day.

"WAS IT ALL JUST A DREAM?"

In Ray Bradbury's 1953 dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*, books are banned and interactive flat screen "parlor walls" anesthetize the population. A ragtag collection of hobo intellectuals take to the woods to become talking books, each preserving a treasured text. In Bradbury's world, people stopped reading because the combined forces of censorship and political correctness have reduced content to "vanilla tapioca," while a cacophony of electronic media engulfs the senses. It would be 50 years before Michael Moore's incendiary twist on Bradbury's title (about which Bradbury was not happy) changed the playing field for political documentaries.

Moore's political bent surfaced early. In high school, he earned an Eagle Scout merit badge with a slide show on environmentally unfriendly businesses in his hometown of Flint, Michigan. At the age of 18, he was elected to a seat on the local school board, making him one of the youngest people in the United States ever elected to public office. An early career as an editor and writer inadvertently un-

derwrote his first film, *Roger and Me* (1989). The money came from *Mother Jones* magazine, which had fired him as editor and settled with him for $58,000, enough to get this generation's most successful documentarian started.

Roger and Me was a major critical success, and, for a documentary, a financial success. It introduced what was to become Moore's signature style as the shambling provocateur, the omniscient innocent, the champion and surrogate for the little guy, Huck Finn politicized. It could be said that Moore is the first famous post-modern filmmaker, never separating the observer from the observed, slyly and shamelessly wearing his message on his sleeve; creating an existential stance from within the movie rather than from without.

Moore's success as both a writer and filmmaker grew with the publication of surprise bestsellers like *Downsize This* (1996) and *Stupid White Men* (2001). His films were likewise successful, building to the major hit of his fourth feature *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), the first documentary ever to be entered into competition at Cannes, where it received the Jury Award. Both a critical and box office hit, *Bowling for Columbine* walked away with the Academy Award in 2003. True to form, Moore used the opportunity of his acceptance speech to declare that "We like nonfiction and we live in fictitious times... We live in a time where we have fictitious election results that elect a fictitious president" (Retrieved November 14, 2004, from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0346468/quotes). Moore predictably garnered cheers and boos and a lot of press.

Throughout 2003, Moore was toiling away on a searing attack on the Bush administration financed by 6 million dollars from Miramax, a Disney company. The week before the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, Disney officially announced that it would not distribute the film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Michael Eisner, CEO of Disney, claimed Miramax had known this for a year; Moore claims Eisner did not want to upset Governor Jeb Bush of Florida, because Disney was in line for some major tax breaks in that state. In any case, the film met with an unprecedented 20-minute standing ovation at Cannes and received the coveted Palme D'Or, the first documentary to do so. Miramax's Weinstein brothers bought the film back, and went into distribution with Lions Gate and IFC Films. The rest is documentary film box office history. Following its release on June 24, 2004, *Fahrenheit 9/11* set every box office record for a documentary, breaking the $100 million dollar mark in its first month. Its subsequent effect (or lack thereof) on the 2004 presidential election is as open to debate as content of the film itself.

As with *Heart and Minds*, reviews of *Fahrenheit 9/11* were mixed. Excerpts from more than 300 reviews can be found at http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/fahrenheit_911/. A sample follows: "preaching to the choir" (Fred Topel); "funny; passionate, and poignant" (Phil Villarreal); "a poleaxe polemic" (Jamie Russell); "a second rate documentary, but...first-rate entertainment and top-notch muckracking" (Mark Keizer); " a high-spirited and unruly exercise in democratic self-expression" (A.O. Scott). Every pundit online and off took a turn at churning out a review, adding up to the collective opinion that the movie was "funny, power-

ful, and good, but flawed." The film is a sprawling montage fueled by a rapid-fire succession of ironies. Writing in *The Observer*, Andrew Anthony (2004) noted that *Fahrenheit 9/11* is

> with a couple of exceptions, a triumph of editing. Indeed, Moore is arguably the most ideological and emotive editor since Sergei Eisenstein, the Soviet propagandist who developed a kind of didactic montage. Juxtaposing heroes and villains, he cuts between political comedy and tragic reality with intoxicating glee.

The first sequence in the film, about the 2000 presidential election, provides enough twists and turns to give the viewer whiplash and establishes Michael Moore's low opinion of "journalism." The filmmaker-narrator-innocent asks the following: "Was it all just a dream?" A soundtrack of fierce country fiddling plays over clips of network news footage, including Dan Rather projecting Al Gore the winner in Florida, CNN calling the election for Gore, "then something called the Fox News Channel" calling the election for George W. Bush. (Where it is noted that Bush's cousin was heading the election desk.) Within a few minutes, Moore has skewered both traditional network "news" anchors, and the "fair and balanced" Fox. It is clear that he has no respect for journalism as practiced by either orientation, and the viewer is forewarned that what is to come plays by different rules—Michael Moore's rules for docutainment.

Moore establishes his voice with childlike simple questions and statements:

> Make sure the chairman of your campaign is also the vote countin' woman and that her state has hired a company that's gonna knock voters off the roles who aren't likely to vote for you. You can usually tell them by the color of their skin.

Or, it's not hard to become president "if all your daddy's friends are on the Supreme Court." Using references to "Daddy" throughout the film keeps George W. Bush a permanent child as well. Such colloquialism notwithstanding, on Moore's Web site (http://www.michaelmoore.com), he offers more than 100 pages of supporting documentation for his claims.

Officials of the Bush administration, whose lofty positions one expects to be made of pure ethos, are seen in a series of clips having make-up applied for television: President Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleeza Rice, and Colin Powell appear, and Paul Wolfowitz is shown in an especially creepy shot. The implication of this ironic choice is that it is all theater, they are not for real, not to be trusted. Later, a series of sound bites from the same "cast" about weapons of mass destruction and Al Qaeda are statements now known to be false. Powell and Rice are seen contradicting even themselves. It is a sequence reminiscent of the march of similarly dubious presidential statements in *Hearts and Minds*.

Moore's nuanced remembrance of September 11, 2001 itself is inspired, with the screen going dark for a minute of audio-only of the planes hitting the towers,

followed by another minute of reaction shots, ending in a symphonic score over the terrible beauty of papers swirling through the darkened sky. Moore plays against expectation; a filmmaker often over the top deeply understates the catastrophic event, all the more to give it new power for the viewer. Moore's restraint in this moment is especially welcome, if short-lived.

"WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE"

Moore appropriates popular culture at will: rock and roll, themes from "Dragnet" and "Peter Gunn," old movie clips. The sense is MTV meets "60 Minutes" meets Comedy Central. This amalgam is never used to better effect than in a Christmas Eve scene on patrol in Baghdad, where the song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" plays over a harrowing house raid. The squad leader speaks a familiar line: "We have to win the hearts and minds of the people. That's our job."

American soldiers are portrayed in a variety of ways, from the crude ("it's the ultimate rush;" "burn motherfucker burn"), to the thoughtful ("you cannot kill someone without killing a part of yourself"), to the maimed in the VA hospital, to the bitter ("I really hope they do not re-elect that fool, honestly.") The preceding quote is from the last letter of Lila Lipscomb's son, who, in the ultimate tragic irony, becomes the touchstone of parental grief when he is killed in Iraq. The contrast between his mother's bedrock patriotism and her subsequent grief and disillusionment forces the question of the Iraq war in the most personal way, a dialectic of horror and loss that reaches out to the viewer like few scenes in any movie. Similar grief is shown in Baghdad. The "Iraqi Other" is humanized by their own loss: "They [the Americans] are cowards...What is this baby's crime?"..."I pray to God to avenge us...God save us from them...."

Michael Moore's conceit, effective as it may be, is to be a part of the story, sometimes a larger than life part, sometimes an annoying part as when he ambushed an addled Charlton Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*. Although Moore does the voiceover for *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he appears on screen only six times, and in each case it is strategic. Moore the political prankster is at his best driving around Washington, DC in an ice cream truck reciting the Patriot Act, or trying to get congresspersons to sign their kids up for the military, pointing out that only 1 of 535 members of Congress has a child in Iraq. The contrast between substance and style is Michael Moore's meta-irony. Beyond all of the constructions of contradiction from shots to segments, Moore himself with his incongruous presence heightens the folly to be exposed.

Moore's use of humor to call attention to the absurdities of a tragic situation is a key device. A post-September 11th ad for a "safe room" and a *Today Show* segment on a contraption designed as a parachute for jumping from high buildings are examples of Moore's quirky selection of clips that manage to be funny and frightening at the same time. Moore's deadpan delivery of lines like "Would Clinton arrange

for the McVeigh family to leave the country?" strengthens their ironic impact. More often than not he seems to know instinctively when to back off and when to pull out the stops, but he is always present whether on screen or off. Moore's use of both an original score that can swell on cue and music from popular culture is a further way to heighten the ironies of his message. The song by the Animals, "We Gotta' Get Out of This Place," underscores Bush sitting for the famous 7 minutes after hearing that the country was under attack. A single phrase from Eric Clapton's "Cocaine" punctuates records of Bush's absence from military duty. A long sequence of shots of both Bushes acting very friendly with assorted Saudi princes and businessmen is set to REM's "Shiny Happy People." The infamous aircraft carrier "Mission Accomplished" scene bounces along to the song by the Bee Gees, "I'm Walking on Air," calling further attention to the fact that the longer term mission in Iraq was, indeed, not accomplished at all. For more than 2 hours, Moore paints a picture of ironies and contradictions with a broad brush of humor, music, narration (his), and occasional appearances on screen. The effectiveness of the film is undeniable in both stimulating political discourse outside of the theater and in depicting (and perhaps exacerbating) the exceptional polarization of its political environment. How does it compare to its venerable predecessor *Hearts and Minds?* How have times changed?

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

There are a striking number of parallels and echoes from *Hearts and Minds* to *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Both political documentaries had distribution problems, both met with an enthusiastic critical reception at Cannes, and both generated widespread controversy elsewhere. There are a remarkable number of war shots with the same content. Both films show maimed American GIs, both show callous GIs (*Hearts and Minds:* "To say it's thrilling—yes—it's deeply satisfying;" *Fahrenheit 9/11:* "It's the ultimate rush ... you're going into the fight...). Both films show graphic civilian casualties, grieving parents on both sides, outraged Vietnamese or Iraqis; naïve, duplicitous, politicians and warriors (*Hearts and Minds:* Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Westmoreland, Rostow; *Fahrenheit 9/11:* Bush, Cheney, Rice, Powell, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Ashcroft). Both films show fat cats: Saigon businessmen in one case and Saudis and the Carlyle Group in the other. Both show the president (Nixon and George W. Bush) at black-tie affairs. The quotes at the top of this essay by Nixon (the United States has exercised restraint) and Rumsfeld (the care that goes into targeting) suggest equivalent attitudes. If Michael Moore had not insisted that *Fahrenheit 9/11* be judged in the feature film category rather than as a documentary, it is likely he would have received an Academy Award in 2005, just as *Hearts and Minds* did in 1975. There is much in these two films to suggest that there may be some eternal verities of war representation. In addition, the use of strategies of irony in the editing of both films gives them a structural resonance and a parallelism of argumenta-

tion. Still, in important ways, the films depart radically from each other in reflecting the mediated environments which spawned them.

A TRIUMPH OF "INFOTAINMENT"

Hearts and Minds was released in 1974, at the tail end of the 10-year Vietnam War. Although it can hardly be said to have had a political impact on the war and peace process, as a retrospective of the conflict, it was without peer at that time. The release in 2004 of a new 35mm print is a testament to enduring interest. For all of the film's strong argument, Davis directed it within the strictures of journalistic values and practices. He had come out of the highly regarded CBS documentary unit at the twilight of an age when news and entertainment divisions could still be distinguished. The idea of the "nonfiction novel" that Truman Capote popularized in 1966 with *In Cold Blood* was still the exception in 1975. The self-referential "new journalism" typified by Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, Timothy Crouse, and others was just getting a foothold. Standards of balance and objectivity were still the norm, or at least the goal, or at least the fantasy, in news and journalism. The merger of news and entertainment gained momentum with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, fusing Hollywood and Washington. Michael Rogin wrote that "Reagan's easy slippage between movies and reality is synecdochic for a political culture increasingly impervious to distinctions between fiction and history" (1988, p. 22). It was during Reagan's first term that Jean Baudrillard described the "brutal loss of signification in every domain," leading to "a universe where there is more and more information and less and less meaning" (1983, p. 95).

Genre meltdown picked up speed in the 1990s beginning with the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas hearings in 1990 through Oliver Stone's 1991 fact–fiction mélange in *JFK*, the video game representation of Desert Storm, and the O. J. Simpson spectacle in 1994. Television news divisions were under increasing pressure for ratings at any journalistic cost, and by the year 2000, the tabloidization of American mainstream media—especially television—had hastened the encroachment of entertainment production and content values into the news room, making news increasingly indistinguishable from entertainment. At the same time, stiff competition for leisure time was presented by video games and the Internet, and in 1996, Newscorp introduced the new (most would say ironic) idea of "fair and balanced" news with Fox News Channel.

It is within this environment that Michael Moore honed his skills at savvy audience analysis. Moore owes more to political theater in the tradition of Bertold Brecht and Augusto Boal than to the 60 *Minutes* school of reporting. Like a reborn yippie or one of Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters, Moore never saw a stunt he was unwilling to pull if it got attention to drive home the point at hand. Although at first glance he resembles Big Bird in a baseball cap, Moore is a wily communicator who knows how to speak the cinematic language of a popular culture where the elision

between news and entertainment is complete, and further yet a culture where the production values of entertainment have prevailed.

When Penelope Gilliat (1975) wrote that you could throw the pieces of *Hearts and Minds* up in the air and they would come down with the same story, she could have been referring to what Michael Moore accomplished 30 years later. *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* share an uncanny collection of cinematic elements, yet one is guided journalistically through meticulous editing to craft an invisible narrator to act as the filmmaker's proxy, and the other works first as entertainment through the larger than life presence of a class clown who has come to deliver a deadly serious message and knows the only way he can get and sustain attention is through packaging news as entertainment. Moore learned the lessons of *Hearts and Minds* that uncensored war imagery, a human look at the "enemy," and a reminder of presidential deceit are necessary if not sufficient elements in creating a persuasive case against war. Davis and Moore are filmmakers for their time, both deploying the ancient trope of antithesis to build an argument, but using styles of framing and delivery appropriate to a radically altered media universe. Alas, it would seem that the more media change, the more war stays the same.

REFERENCES

Anthony, A. (2004, May 23). Michael and me. *The Observer*. Retrieved May 5. 2005, from http://www.observer.guardian.co.uk/screen/story10,,1222425,00.html

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Baudrillard, J. (1983). *In the shadow of the silent majorities*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Bradbury, R. (1953). *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Canby, V. (1975, March 24). Hearts and minds: A film study of power. *New York Times*, 38.

Cicero (1969). *Rhetorica ad herennium* (H. Caplan Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published ca. 86 B.C.E.)

Crist, J. (2002). Liner notes in hearts and minds. Criterion collection [DVD]. United States: Home Vision Entertainment.

Czarnecki, J. (Producer), & Moore, M. (Director). (2004) *Fahrenheit 9/11* [Motion Picture]. United States: IFC Films.

Davis, P. (Director). (2002). *Hearts and minds*. Criterion collection [DVD]. United States: Home Vision Entertainment.

DeAntonio, E. (Producer & Director) (1968). *Vietnam: In the year of the pig*. [Motion Picture]. Italy: Turin Film Corp.

Gilliatt, P. (1975, March 17). A filmmaker's meditation on America. *New Yorker*, n.v., 120-126.

Goodman, W. (1975, March 23). The false art of the propaganda film. *New York Times*, II:1.

Hamill, P. (2004, September 25). When the shooting stopped. *New York Times*, A15.

Harrington, S. (1975, March 11). First an undeclared war, now an unseen film. *New York Times*, II:1, 17.

Hegel, G.W.F. (2004) *Phenomenology of mind*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1807)

Kauffman, S. (1975, March 15). Stanley Kauffman on films. *New Republic*, 72, 22.

Kanfer, S. (1975 March 17). War-torn. Time. Retrieved May 5, 2005 from http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,912958,00.html

Kopkind, A. (1975, April). The adamant memory of Vietnam. *Ramparts*, *13*, 38–44.

Ondjaatje, M. (2002). *The conversations: Walter Murch and the art of film editing*. New York: Knopf.

Rogin, M. (1988). *Ronald Reagan the movie and other episodes in political demonology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rotten Tomatoes. (2004). Michael Moore movie reviews. Retrieved November 14, 2004, from http://www.rottentomatoes/m/fahrenheit_911/

Schneider, B. (Producer), and Davis, P. (Director). (1974) *Hearts and minds* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Brothers.

Simon, J. (1975, June). Better Vietnam than Barbra Streisand. *Esquire*, n.v., 64–65.

Sobran, M.J. Jr. (1975, June 6). Heartless and mindless. *National Review, 27*, 621.

Turan, K. (1975, May). Hearts and minds. *The Progressive*, 39, 38–39.

Weiner, B. (1974, Winter). Hearts and minds. *Film Quarterly, 28*, 60–63.

Wilder, C. & Collins, S. (1994). Patterns of interactional paradoxes. In W. Cupach and B. Spitzberg (Eds.). *The dark side of interpersonal communication*. (pp. 83–103). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.