

Introduction

This volume compiles the proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the Croatian Association for American Studies, *Media, American Culture, and Global Perspective: Images, Ideas, and Illusion*, held on March 31, 2023 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka. The conference brought together eighteen scholars from Europe and the United States, who collectively explored the intricate interplay between media, technology, and culture. This scholarly assembly provided a platform for in-depth discussions on how media influences our global society. The keynote lecture, delivered by Professor Emerita Denise Pilato from Eastern Michigan University, titled *Patterns of Perception in Media Culture: The Paradoxical Effect of Digital Images*, set the stage for an intellectually stimulating exchange of ideas. Contributions from various disciplines reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the discussions, offering multifaceted perspectives on the construction, perpetuation, and significance of media representations within both the global landscape and the American cultural milieu.

The five chapters presented in this volume are intended to extend and deepen the conversation initiated at the conference. Apart from addressing the West's long-standing influence over the world's media systems and how it has surveyed and shaped the economy, affected human consciousness, and promoted ideologically biased reality, the contributions to this volume also examine the complexities inherent in the rapid proliferation of data and imagery, drawing attention to the vulnerability in the consumption of ideas and the potential for disinformation fueled by both legitimate media outlets and overseas bots, along with important facts and essential information that characterize our increasingly interconnected digital era. Through a

thorough investigation of a wide array of cultural and semiotic practices—ranging from fiction, TV series, docuseries, and film to the far-reaching implications of digital platforms, such as war blogs, podcasts, and propaganda mechanisms particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic—this collection offers a profound examination of media’s role in shaping contemporary cultural narratives and emphasizes the need for critical assessment and enhanced media literacy, recognizing that everyday digital images and other media outlets are consumed by global audiences that interpret meaning through diverse cultures, values, traditions, and life experiences.

In Chapter 1, “Media and Language as Political Instruments in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen*,” Valentina Markasović analyzes the use of media and language via political articulation as platforms of indoctrination and control in two dystopian series—*The Hunger Games* trilogy (*Hunger Games* [2008], *Catching Fire* [2009], and *Mockingjay* [2010]) by Suzanne Collins and *Red Queen* series (*Red Queen* [2015], *Glass Sword* [2016], *King’s Cage* [2017], *War Storm* [2018], and a collection titled *Broken Throne* [2019]) by Victoria Aveyard. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s work on power, knowledge, and ideology, which exposes people as compliant, “docile bodies,” Theodor Adorno’s study about the impact of television on the spectators, and, most importantly, George Orwell’s take on the vagueness of political language—long words, euphemisms, exhausted idioms, and obfuscated phrasing—to distract the public and disguise the governments’ intentions, the author closely examines the mechanisms of control by which those in power regulate, supervise, and manipulate the populace of these dystopian novels, molding them into obedient subjects who conform to their regimes’ expectations. The paper argues that, starting with schooling, the child characters in *The Hunger Games* and *Red Queen* are misinformed and deprived of critical thinking, as historical

knowledge is censored and monopolized, and that they mature into law-abiding, pliant citizens, controlled by “linguistic manipulation” and the totalitarian regimes’ ideologies, which are spread “overtly and subliminally” through media, “with mandatory viewings and public video screens.” The author also delves into the lives and activities of the series’ protagonists, who question the status quo of their abusive habitats, rebel against the totalitarian parties, and overthrow them by usurping “the very platform used by the oppressive system—the media,” addressing the masses with “directness and simplicity hailed by Orwell.”

Chapter 2, “The Representation of Trauma via Remediation: Digitality in Jonathan Safran Foer’s Print Novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*,” authored by Lovorka Gruić Grmuša discusses the significance of remediation in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), one of the first novels about the 9/11 attacks. Drawing upon Marshall McLuhan’s understanding of media, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s notion of reciprocal remediation, Samuel Weber’s and Katherine Hayles’s multimodality theories, and W. J. T. Mitchell’s “picture theory,” this chapter explores how the representation of trauma in Foer’s novel is articulated through various remediation strategies. The author argues that by mobilizing a “synergistic interplay” of language with different visual and graphic forms—photographs, word images, diagrams, handwritten letters, die-cut holes, a series of illustrations made into a flipbook, or manipulation of typographical elements—as well as haptic and kinesthetic cues, Foer not only developed an effective technique to address and communicate the “unspeakability of trauma,” which extends beyond mere representation by engaging the readers “in acts of signification” that convey the immediacy and emotional intensity of a traumatic experience, but that he also demonstrated how, “in the era of computationally in-

tensive environments,” print literature and textuality itself can be reinvented and enriched by digital contexts and experimentation with new media technologies.

In Chapter 3, drawing on examples of media events surrounding Prince Harry and Meghan Markle—the Netflix productions *The Crown* and the *Harry & Meghan* docuseries, Meghan Markle’s Spotify podcast, *Archetypes*, as well as articles in American and British media and social media posts—Jadranka Zlomisić’s discussion “Analysis of the News and Social Media Coverage of the British Royal Family: Recollections May Vary” explores how varying reactions to cultural differences reinforce American audiences’ preexisting attitudes toward the British royal family. Informed by the *uses and gratifications theory* and the *negativity bias theory*, the analysis focuses on the shifts in mass media coverage of and media user’s response to the ex-royal couple’s “victimhood narrative,” demonstrating the relevance of combining the two methodological frameworks to identify and explain sociocultural, psychological, and experiential factors related to media content consumption and production, in particular the correlation between the negativity bias and media-audience interaction.

Jasna Poljak Rehlicki’s discussion “War Blogs: Alternative Media in Narrating the War?” (Chapter 4) examines how wars are reported and represented by focusing on the unlikely new medium—the war blog. Indicating that the phenomenon of military blogging often contradicts the tone of the traditional war narrative and fills it with an unexpected immediacy and pathos/ethos from those on the front lines, Poljak Rehlicki looks at how each war finds its own specific medium in its diversity, with blogs emerging as the defining medium of the Iraq War of the early 2000s. Her analysis highlights the perspective of American soldiers and the way perceptions of wars fought overseas in the name of the American flag have been shaped over the decades,

significantly influencing public attitudes and, in turn, the military's response to it, offering specific television coverage of the war to gain approval through a controlled, "trustworthy . . . sanitized version of combat." Analyzing Colby Buzzell's war blog *CBFTW* (*Colby Buzzell Fuck the War*), which he launched during his deployment to Iraq in 2004, and his memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* (2005), Poljak Rehlicki, drawing on Baudrillard, reminds us that the various forms of state-orchestrated media representation of war are not identical to the actual events but are, rather, their manipulated simulation, offering a spectacle to which affective war blogs provide an interactive, commentary-friendly alternative and a genuine antidote.

In Chapter 5, "'Give Us Our Daily Dread': Dystopian Traces in the COVID-19 Media Discourse on the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters," Jelena Pataki Šumiga explores the parallels between the media discourse used by the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters during the COVID-19 pandemic and the rhetorical strategies found in canonical dystopian literature, particularly George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The author argues that the crucial role of the media in shaping public perception and maintaining compliance with lockdown measures resembles the propaganda methods employed by authoritarian regimes in dystopian narratives. The analysis highlights the manipulation of language and the framing of Civil Protection representatives as benevolent leaders, fostering trust while simultaneously instilling fear. Pataki Šumiga maintains that strategies such as promoting social isolation, ostracizing of the infected people, applying peer pressure, and using monitoring and control as instruments of surveillance, along with the paradoxical use of "doublespeak," reflect a calculated effort to command the populace's behavior, reinforce obedience, and force the population into submission. By examining specific statements from Civil Protection

representatives, the chapter reveals the dystopian elements embedded in the rhetoric of crisis management, suggesting that the COVID-19 media discourse may serve as a contemporary manifestation of the dynamics found in fictional totalitarian societies.

With its cross-cultural breadth and interdisciplinary methodology, this volume aspires to broaden the horizons of American studies and contribute to the field's evolution by discerning pioneering research trajectories and charting unexplored scholarly terrains as well as by offering invigorating perspectives on well-established domains. As editors, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all contributors for generously imparting their scholarly insights into the complex intersections of media and culture as well as the intrinsic tensions that shape and mediate human experience within an increasingly technology-governed world.

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