Interrogating the War on Terror
Interrogating the War on Terror:
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by

Deborah Staines

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In memory of all victims of the Iraq War, 2003–
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D. Staines
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INTRODUCTION

INTERROGATING THE “WAR ON TERROR” PARADIGM

DEBORAH STAINES

This volume is issued in the long shadow of the burning towers of the World Trade Center (WTC), New York, and the bilious smoke rising from passenger aircraft ruins in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon, Washington, DC. It is mindful of the 2,996 victims of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and it remembers them. However, it also aims to do justice to their memory by asking questions of the wars and rhetorics that grew from that day, and whether the memory of the dead victims, or indeed the lives of any of the living, are served by them. This volume aims for an ethical engagement with the problems and paradoxes of a contemporary global reality: the material effects of the so-called war on terror, and the concomitant practising of discourses of war and terrorism. It performs this engagement under the aegis of Jacques Derrida’s reminder that ethics is a practice of social hope (Derrida 1990). Given that his critique also posits justice as an ultimate impossibility, the current geopolitical assaults justified as a war originally named Infinite Justice raise the spectre of a mise en abym of justice, always receding as the Coalition of the Willing advance upon it.

In announcing a “war on terror” President George W. Bush said it “begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated,” and went on to claim that there were thousands of terrorists in over 60 countries.1 The implication was that any or all of these countries could become new warfronts. The main theatres of operation for the so-called war on terror at present are Iraq and Afghanistan. Military strikes by the United States have also been conducted against Somalia under the same rhetoric, and threats against Iran and North Korea have been issued. At a time when the “war on terror” is the new global conflict consuming untold resources and replacing the Cold War in the West’s social imaginary, it is important to problematise, if not resist, the claims favouring this war. This volume therefore aims to interrogate the paradigm of
Introduction

contemporary reality summed up in the popularly circulating terms war on terror, “war on terrorism” and “terror war”. These terms have been crafted by the dominant discourse on terrorism, consolidated since the early 1980s by government, media, think tanks, and the military, especially in the United States (Herman and O’Sullivan 1991, 40). In their deployment of such terms, these institutions have constituted a socio-cultural paradigm of meaning. Like the operations of a scientific paradigm, first theorised by Thomas Kuhn, it has practices that shape the material world through its meaning-making and other substantive effects including the distribution of resources (Kuhn 1962). Its effects are evident in the everyday social and cultural environment: as the anthropologist Catherine Lutz has demonstrated through fieldwork, towns hosting American military bases are typically “places where pervasive child poverty, domestic violence, prostitution, environmental catastrophes large and small, and homelessness coexist with the nation’s massive state of war readiness,” (Lutz 2003, 45). Historically, the current conflict may well be remembered as “a new type of war” as initially recorded at a U.S. command centre on September 11, 2001 (Kean 2004, 4), but this volume examines how its operations are not so much new as repetitive and paradigmatic—that is, how they reproduce and instantiate a cultural paradigm inscribing war and terror. In this volume the contributors aim to demonstrate and critique how this paradigm is evident in contemporary discourse, and related cultural forms and practices.

Bush’s memo cited above was probably not intended to imply that the “war against terrorism” (emphasis added) is what has ushered in horrific acts against innocent civilians, sometimes with the direct support of States … (President George W. Bush, 2002)

Bush’s memo cited above was probably not intended to imply that the “war against terrorism” (emphasis added) is what has ushered in horrific acts against innocent civilians, sometimes with the direct support of States such as the U.S. the U.K. and Australia. Nonetheless, that has certainly been the outcome of this and various other directives. The war on terror delivers a reality paradigm so dominant, that it has been described as a potentially “endless war,” (AP 2005). Without denying the pain and suffering of victims of terrorism and war, this collection of papers aims to open up a space for interrogating that paradigm. It will examine the definitions of terrorism, the discursive constructs unique to the so-called war on terror such as “enemy combatants” and “moral torture”, and the cultural effects of this twenty first century conflict. The authors ask, what are the consequences of investing in this war over other priorities? In the course of examining the mobilisation of social and cultural resources in the current war, these papers point to other pressing realities—such as human rights violations—equally deserving of the West’s terror, and its resources in combating them.
They remind us of the need for visible counter-publics—such as the anti-globalisation movement and human shields—and the articulation of counter-discourses, positing alternate priorities. This volume covers a variety of topical issues and opens up to contestation the assumptions underlying terror war. It is not a survey work, but rather a set of specific engagements with particular concerns. It presents a selection of papers from the United States, Britain and Australia, and this enables an implicit exploration of the alliance of the Coalition of the Willing, as the tensions of historical and cultural differences are revealed through the papers. By drawing on cultural theory, these papers introduce a range of political, legal, artistic and social critiques; and the authors have aimed to reference published works and cite the most recent events in the war on terror, thus creating a space for informed counter-discourse.

**Historicising the “war on terror”**

Discourses and cultural effects must be analysed coldly, beyond the heat of the moment of September 11, 2001, or London’s July 7, or the two Bali bombings—although each of these sites, and others, still burn in memory. How do we experience, know, and remember such events? James Der Derian has critically argued that “9/11 quickly took on an exceptional ahistoricity,” (Der Derian 2002, 178), and this status has since been used to justify a range of invasive, pre-emptive and destructive military actions. Yet the standard treatment of these events, the *9/11 Commission Report*, draws on a vast number of sources, including multiple witness statements, to analyse and historically contextualise September 11, 2001. Another significant outcome of the post-attack investigations is the mass of documentation produced by the recovery process: the records of detailed forensic and materials analyses of the WTC site, for instance, are indices to an historical moment. Such documentation is not neutral, and will gradually yield to historians a story of the times, and the power-knowledge at work in its construction. This volume therefore separates those terms raised by Der Derian, in order to engage in a history of the present which interrogates the so-called war on terror through a critique of its terms and practices, to show that it is not ahistorical. Further, whilst many of these papers do reference to September 11, 2001, indicating its widespread significance, they also problematise the politics of exceptionalism.

Discourse is at work in shaping our perception of even the most graphic scenes of carnage. To take just one instance in the representation of September 11 for example—that of those people who deliberately jumped from the burning WTC towers, to their death below. Within hours of the attacks these desperate individuals, perceived by onlookers through the smoke and at times filmed, became colloquially known as “the jumpers”. Afterwards, the mess of their
bodily remains were responsibly attended to through an Identification Process, by New York City’s Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (National Institute of Justice 2006). However, the ME’s office decided not to identify those who perished in this fashion as jumpers, thereby flexing its authority to constitute the body of the victim. This quote from the national newspaper *USA Today* indicates the kind of discursive practice I am talking about:

‘A “jumper” is somebody who goes to the office in the morning knowing that they will commit suicide,’ says Ellen Borakove, spokeswoman for the medical examiner’s office. ‘These people were forced out by the smoke and flames or blown out.’ She says the medical examiner’s office couldn’t determine who jumped because the injuries were similar to those suffered by the people killed in the collapse of the towers. The manner of death for all those who died was listed as homicide on death certificates. (Cauchon and Moore)

Can discourse shape the very constitution of something so formless as these ruined humans? Of course, it can, as Michel Foucault’s studies of clinical perception revealed so profoundly. It does so through the prescribing of terms, the fixing of anatomical parameters, and the instituting of a normative body (Foucault 1977c). Documentation such as the ME’s will yield to future analysts the discursive speculum implemented to describe September 11, 2001; and a thorough study would compare and contrast the medical examiner’s opinion with the recorded words of those emergency response personnel who, in organising the evacuation of occupants from the WTC, maintained a wary upward eye for those people they and the *Report* named “jumpers” and only allowed building evacuees to cross open ground when the air was clear (Kean, 296, 300, 303, 309-11). The cultural effect of amassing and archiving such documentation is to create, and cement, the historical status of September 11, 2001. Therefore, it does not exist outside history—rather, it is highly produced by the “culture of 9/11” as history (see Staines, this volume).

Further, government and military response to the attacks on September 11, 2001, contribute anything but an ahistorical interpretation of events. The capacity to wage a war on terror, and the content of terror war rhetoric, are contiguous with post-Enlightenment, Western social practices and cultural values. The war on terror does not sever society from its imaginary relation to a progress narrative so much as it reinscribes that narrative through rhetorical defences of “our way of life” and essentialist framing of a fight between civilisations (Bush 2001). This situation must return critical emphasis to the actual practices, not the hope and ideals, of contemporary society and culture in dealing with terrorist attacks. Stemming from the industrial-military complex funded by Western capitalism, the executive responses—especially the Coalition of the Willing’s invasion of Iraq on a pretext of exporting democracy—have not take place outside of that history. The war on terror
developed in a foreign policy context shaped by the West—one which denies Western state terrorism—and proceeds with historiscisable discourse, practices and effects. It is up to critics to analyse the significance of the forces acting within and upon the contemporary geopolitic—for example, to evaluate the social and cultural conventions which influence what we think about war and terror, and which lead to one set of ideas, objectives and predicted outcomes becoming more appealing and credible than an alternative.

**Interrogating the paradigm**

The paradigm that has emerged in the last few years has roped together the terminology of terror and war into a new globalised conglomerate of lived social and cultural practices. This already protracted engagement is the progenitor of new political alliances, neologisms and euphemisms, and diverse cultural effects. Although applying the term “paradigm”, I am not adhering closely to Kuhn’s entire formulation—for post-structuralism and its techniques for discourse analysis has offered a more flexible approach to critiquing discursive productions than Kuhn’s. However, the attraction of paradigm as a term is that it captures something that lurks within the phrase “war on terror”. To declare war is a significant speech act. It seemed to me, when originally framing this project, that the phrase “war on terror” was key to a veritable paradigm of power, knowledge and bodies. It was a discursive act that made what for some might be unthinkable material commitments: to commit war and to commit subjects to terror. From this single phrase enormous social and cultural investments would be disciplined—from the might of global economic and military power, to the local involvement of community and conversation. How, then, did it become so thinkable? If we recall that Kuhn’s influential study was a history of knowledge production, aimed at tracking “paradigm shifts” in the formation of meaning, we can see the relevance of this terminology to analysing the present moment. In claiming that a paradigm is at work, there is an intention to contest the representation of these contemporary events, and interrogate how knowledge of them is constituted by a paradigm which instrumentally situates, describes and produces.

Having asserted this, the key question is, How do paradigms effect their strategic dominance? Firstly, it is not through conspiracy or corruption, although the paradigm may remain subsurface. Paradigms are structurally powerful—they provide an infrastructure of apparently coherent and stable meanings. They function as an index to meaning, and therefore to the production and legitimation of related cultural forms and practices. As Kuhn says, a paradigm enables the visibility of norms and rules; it enables their coming into being and development for application (Kuhn 1962, 46). They can, therefore, be seen as
deterministic or governing. In Foucauldian terms, a paradigm provides conditions of possibility. The operations of the paradigm measure and manipulate the material world, and so must be perceived as productive, not only reactive or conservative, conditions. Because representations of war and of terrorism influence our judgement and our responses, we must debate the paradigm that generates them, undo its premises, and subject it to contestation. However, debating a dominant paradigm can occur without necessarily destabilising it (this may be thought of as refinement of the paradigm). Debate does not prevent the paradigm from its guiding, binding effects on the reality of lived experience; it still allows for the operation of human endeavour within the dominant paradigm. However, as Kuhn’s title reveals, a change of paradigm is equal to a revolution in thinking. The objective of this volume is therefore to contest specific aspects of the paradigm in operation, to probe and ask: How secure is this paradigm? Even this simple, abstract question could betray a desire to overturn the current way of thinking—and that would fly in the face of the new discursive emphases on security.

By intervening in the popularised relation of the terms “war on terror” these papers question their dominance over alternative means of understanding contemporary realities and risks. Despite the passage of several years, there are few volumes comparable to this one. Dissent from the Homeland (Hauerwas and Lentricchia 2003) and Understanding September 11 (Calhoun, Price and Timmer 2002) are two of the best academic critiques of the mobilisation of the war on terror. This publishing trend in part reflects the operation of a dominant paradigm—for there are many publications available that tacitly or explicitly assert the existence of a war on terror, and then debate and rationalise its application. They express an American sense of vulnerability by speaking of an uncertain future and of engagement with an unfamiliar enemy. They capitalise on the fear generated by September 11, 2001, making accusations of under-funded military capability and policing and analysis failures, and present improved security solutions. They manipulate the new language of international terrorism: violent jihad, militant Islamist, suicide bomber, preparedness. Suddenly, there is an overt emphasis on survival—a language echoing World War Two and Cold War rhetoric—and an over-reliance on military force to produce justice. These volumes operate well within the paradigm. They do not problematise the paradigm itself, or deploy the cross-disciplinary perspectives that this volume offers. In this volume, the practices, effects, and future of the paradigm are addressed across a range of topics.

The paradigm for a war on terror can be traced in the operations of government, military, law, economy, media, and penalty, and in its effects on embodied subjects. It is visible in the bureaucracy of newly formed government bodies such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It is represented in
the ideological agenda of the neo-conservative movement in the U.S. It is expressed by the large military engagements of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq) and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). It is practised through new laws invented for the purpose of counter-terrorism, especially in the United States, Britain, and Australia (USA Patriot Act 2001; UK Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; Australian Anti-terrorism Act 2004). It takes form in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in Camps Delta and X-Ray. It is perpetuated in secret CIA flights enabling the illegal transfer of prisoners to U.S. soil, via Europe—renditions first reported in 2004 and still under investigation (Grey 2006; Norton-Taylor 2006; Priest 2004). It is challenged in military courts which unravel the present-day abuses of long-standing war conventions such as the Geneva conventions and U.N. protocols.

Democratically elected governments are not above spreading alarm and unease amongst the population. It can be done in a number of ways, and for various reasons, including political and monetary gain. The links between war and economy are deep and historical. At the beginning of the twenty first century, the post-World War II military-industrial complex, and the increasing privatisation of security has forged a close relationship between state, military and commerce in American economics (Avant 2005; Singer 2003). The viability of a war on terror to the world’s largest economy is underscored by the first plane strike into the WTC. The twin towers were a global economic hub. The complete destruction of the towers and their personnel, and the shut-down of the financial district around them—including the closure of the NY Stock Exchange for five days—sent shockwaves through the global markets. Executive decisions about the Exchange generated investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG 2003; Dalton 2003), and litigation, amid rumours of pressure from the White House to declare Wall St “safe” (Kean 326-7, 555 n1). Since then, the daily financial news has been peppered with reports on the “peak oil” theory of imminent oil production shortages, rising oil prices, and accompanying price gouging. In other economic developments, attempts to net al-Qaeda via a roll-up of its financial circuitry and the discovery of a significant al-Qaeda funding network in Europe (House Committee on Financial Services 2002), have disputed the simplistic Bush Administration positioning of them—and-us as a false economy. The so-called home grown bombers of the London transport attacks underscored this.

The paradigm of war on terror shapes developments in operations of security, torture, incarceration, and prisoner abuse. The shifting legality of penalty throughout this period—the secret torture deals done with Egypt, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq, and Guantánamo Bay’s peculiar status anterior to international law and the conventions of war, are exemplary of this—is also a key concern in this volume. These brutal realities of the paradigm are
experienced at the bio-political level, when the paradigm’s penalty regime bears down on the body of a single individual. To a certain extent, the emotional scars of the war on terror are more articulable than other aspects. In the world of knowledge professionals, especially the “caring professions” of psychology, medicine and social work, fear, anxiety and trauma are increasingly popular topics for research, conferencing, and publication. But one of the side-effects of the paradigm is to obscure the prevalence of terror—that is, it limits how terror can be thought about outside of the so-called war on terror. This, in a world saturated with the blood of victims of murder, poverty, political repression, torture and rape. Essays within this volume take up the challenge of exploring “terror” in its historically contingent manifestations.

Many remarked that fiction became fact on September 11, 2001, thinking of Hollywood films such as The Siege (1998), and novels like Executive Orders (1997) which opens with a hijacked jumbo jet being piloted into the Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The role of media and the arts in making war and terror cannot be underestimated. As experts such as Martha Crenshaw have shown, the logic of modern terrorism uses strategic spectacle (Crenshaw 1990). Terrorism, unlike conventional military target attrition, exercises dramatic power through the mass media coverage it receives, rather more than it does through numbers of casualties. This means that the impact of terrorism appears to be affective rather than finite, and communicated rather than combated. However, needless to say, media manipulation is not restricted to one side of the conflict. The American Neocons have a symbiotic relationship with big business, including the media, and their message has been loudly proclaimed since September 11. The embedded journalist is a well-publicised product of the latest Iraq war, and a symbol of the impossibility of mass media articulating a clear-cut independence from the progenitors of war on terror discourse. In TV and press media expert commentary there is a “blurring of boundaries between the academic study of counter-terrorism and the private security trade” (Toolis 2004). Robert McChesney, respected journalist and fierce critic of the U.S. media, predicted early on that certain issues will not be debated in the mainstream press in this historical context. He wrote that “the role of the military as the ultimate source of power will not be questioned”; and that the notion that “the United States is a uniquely benevolent force in the world will be undisputed” (McChesney 2002, 97). It took the crimes of Abu Ghraib to shake this entrenched perspective.

Dominant cultural narratives (such as the Cold War, in which then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice is an expert) may have blinkered people beforehand. Afterwards, the force of established cultural narratives and prejudice still predominated, and framed media reportage and agency interpretations of violence, terrorism and Islam (Karim 2002, 102). Racial
profiling by the intelligence agencies, and the invention of screening technologies to assist it, has been significantly boosted as a result of the war on terror. Racial profiling constructs a grid of intelligibility that makes "men of middle eastern appearance" visible, to be targeted by a range of instruments of governmentality, including but not only, counter-terrorist procedures. It was years ago that Hannah Arendt observed that the enforcement of power over the subjects of a state is preferably carried through the actions of the police, because police are more used to conceiving of their own citizens as the target (Arendt 1973, 420). Police techniques and other powers of governmentality, can be utilised to effect more and more direct measures of engagement with targeted subjects. The now close relationship between policing and counter-terrorism—John Pilger names it the “democratic police state”—calls for increased inquiry into these domains (Pilger 2006). Policing, always changing in response to its subject population, presently deploys hi-tech disciplinary tools that extend the state’s power to govern embodied subjects, such as the FBI internet surveillance software Project Carnivore; this raises concerns about the level of social control implied by such systems (Ventura et al. 2005).

**Counter-discourse**

There is a palpable sense that the terror war has been imposed upon us (and by “us” I do mean to address the developed world participating in the Coalition of the Willing)—not only by terrorist attacks but by the kind of thinking that supports militarist responses over diplomacy or social justice. Elected governments have perpetuated this. Governments play on population fears to boost their own political credibility as a secure choice. The official reporting of exaggerated WMD threats played on general ignorance of the technical requirements of warfare (Levi 2003). In Australia, democratic principles have been undermined by the introduction of counter-terrorism measures that include preventative detention and sedition laws Marr and Wilkinson 2005). However, in Australia, the federal government failed to gain bi-partisan support for the war in Iraq. This was the first time ever that Australia had gone to war without bi-partisan political support. There were many rallies and street marches in protest, at around the same time that similar protests filled London and Washington—to little avail, it would appear. The notion of undoing the dominant militarist paradigm might seem rather speculative at present. Yet that speculation is essential to imagining a more peaceful and a more just reality—and it has to be hoped for, rather than denied possibility. We do not have to inculcate a militarist/survivalist mindset. To do that is to subject ourselves to the thrall of a highly reductionist view of the future possible. Already, there are critiques of the dominant paradigm appearing in popular culture such as the very
effective cartoon of war amputees described as “battle-hardened” by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (Kutz 2006); and the vocal anti-Iraq war movement in the U.S., spearheaded by Cindy Sheehan’s outspoken campaigning after the death of her enlisted son.¹³ In October 2006, the newly appointed Head of the British Army stated that the continuing presence of the British military “exacerbates the security problems” in Iraq; this criticism of the practice (and implicitly, the policy) of occupation received widespread mainstream news coverage (Shipman 2006). Such instances of counter-discourse remind us that our own culture and its productions always bear re-examination.

Much attention has focussed on the suicide bomber as a paradigmatic figure for international terrorism in the twenty first century. The suicide bomber remains a rather enigmatic but always fundamentalist figure in the social imagination, despite several studies that counter this notion (Pape 2005; Sageman 2004). Robert Pape’s study is important for statistically arguing that the emergence of the suicide bomber and the deployment of suicide missions is inherently geopolitical and strategic rather than based in religious fundamentalism. In the period covered by Pape’s research (his statistics calculate events up to and including 2003), Tamil Tigers were the globe’s leading exponents of suicide terrorism, in a conflict rooted in national resistance. Pape makes a special point of investigating, through comparative statistical analyses, al-Qaeda attacks in relation to U.S. military presence, and finds that: “al-Qaeda suicide terrorists are ten times more likely to come from a Sunni country with American military presence than from another Sunni country” (112); and that “al-Qaeda’s transnational suicide terrorists have come overwhelmingly from America’s closest allies in the Muslim world and not at all from the Muslim regimes that the US State Department considers ’state sponsors of terrorism’” (114). Since this study was published, the situation in Iraq has only reinforced the conclusion that an American military presence is a provocative factor in al-Qaeda-led suicide attacks.

In sum, it is important to foreground the most basic consequences of a war on terror. Mortality is everywhere in acts of war and terrorism, but often disguised through official euphemisms for casualties, minimal reportage of enemy fatalities, and moratoriums on televising the repatriation of deceased service-men and women. Reflecting on America’s history of conflict, Lutz observes “the dead and disappeared have haunted us because we are a war culture, our government massively involved in ordering the killing, training others to kill, and threatening to kill…we have been doubly haunted…because after all of the killing, the bodies are hidden away and denied” (2003, 49). This volume is concerned to pierce the linguistic perversions of the current paradigm, and acknowledge that war is always about killing, maiming, brutalising, and dominating others, and to attend to what is irretrievably lost in those practices.
On September 11, 2006, the independent Iraq Body Count website estimated a minimum of 41,650 civilian deaths as a direct result of the U.S-led military intervention in Iraq. The banner for this website angrily reminds viewers of General Tommy Franks’ blatant disregard for the civilian population of the country his force occupies—citing his statement “We don’t do body counts”.\textsuperscript{14} Figures from a peer-reviewed article published by \textit{The Lancet} are even more alarming, claiming a four-fold increase in the mortality rate of post-invasion Iraq (Burnham et al 2006).

The essays collected here demonstrate that, far from being apolitical or out of touch, academics are motivated to extend our understanding of contemporary world events. To substantiate their contestations, these authors have turned to modern philosophers and political thinkers in an effort to understand these cultural changes. In this volume, the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, Silvan Tomkins, Jeremy Waldron, Kenneth Burke, J.L. Austin, and Jean-Paul Sartre, amongst others, is cited to undo those mental knots which we must encounter when trying to comprehend as vast a challenge as the shift in global politics, discourse and everyday life that this war on terror brings. We cannot predict exactly what will ferment successful counter-discourses—they are as likely to emerge from grass roots actions and mainstream social trends, as from the abstracted realm of critical discourse studies. At the time of going to press, the 2006 U.S. mid-term elections have brought possibilities of change to the prosecution of the Iraq War, in combination with the recently released Iraq Study Group report. Books such as this volume are just a fragment of the myriad conditions of possibility for developing counter-discourse. However, we hope that for the general, as well as the specialist reader, this book will bring clarity to problems around the war on terror, by analysing its precepts and the social and cultural consequences of its events in this historic period of geopolitical change.

\textbf{Chapters}

This volume is a source of humanities, law and political scholarship critiquing the so-called war on terror, featuring new essays by professorial and emerging specialists. They present critical approaches that extend the debate by showing its interdisciplinary relevance. The intersections between the essays enable two key themes to appear: the possibility for counter-discourse drawing on philosophy, socio-political theory and discourse analysis; and the cultural effects of the war on terror, ranging from identity and embodiment affects to cyberspace, media and international law. Reflecting the disciplinary backgrounds of the contributors, it contains essays relevant to American studies, military history, cultural studies, media studies, politics, linguistics and
literature, sociology, and philosophy. The contributors take an interrogatory approach that has not been widely canvassed amongst contemporary publications on the “war on terror”.

Peter Caws opens the discussion by questioning whether this period is even worthy of coming under the rubric of terror. Caws approaches the current war on terror with questions from social and political philosophy. He looks at the ways in which philosophers have dealt with the concept of terror, and considers why the present age has come to be thought of as an age of terror and what it might be said to be the age of if it is not that.

Michael Blain presents further genealogy of the West’s political concept of terrorism, in relation to a critique of the Bush Administration’s push for a global war on terrorism. His discussion links terrorism to the genealogy of liberal modes of power and knowledge in contemporary Western society. Blain delivers an original quantitative and qualitative analysis of the rhetoric of President Bush’s speeches, demonstrating and critiquing how specific terms—such as terror, security, and freedom—are deployed in response to changing strategic contexts.

Joan Kirkby also draws attention to the West’s (especially America’s) traditions of liberal democracy and free speech. Kirkby shows how the neoconservative movement has co-opted American icons of intellectual liberty—such as Walt Whitman—in promoting the war on terror. Reading recent publications from the American Right, this chapter argues that one battleground of the war on terror has been carved out among canonical American literary texts.

Nina Philadelphoff-Puren takes up the Guantánamo incarceration and torture claims of an Australian citizen. Upon his return to Australia, he testified that he had been tortured by interrogators in Pakistan, Egypt and Cuba; these claims joined a widening set of detainee testimony produced in the context of the current war on terror. Philadelphoff-Puren applies theoretical tools to analyse the discursive context in which such claimants speak, to expose the discursive apparatus that is currently working to make certain speech acts about torture infelicitous.

Saul Newman and Michael Levine address the space where politics and philosophy intersect, arguing that the war on terror implies a new paradigm of power. Drawing on Foucault and Agamben’s ideas about “bio-politics”, they ask whether present day conditions find States acting in ways that are increasingly violent, terroristic and outside the law, via previously unthinkable powers of surveillance, coercion and detention. They suggest that far from guaranteeing security, such measures create repression, insecurity and violence. This leads them to raise questions about how the war on terror re-shapes citizen understandings of freedom, democracy and sovereignty.
Kimberley Brownlee continues this concern, using analytical philosophy to consider the uses of terror discourse and the question of personal autonomy in the cultural context of a presumed threat of terrorism. Her discussion closely maps points of fear, coercion, will, and community response in the agentic field of terrorisation.

In a unique image-essay, artist George Gittoes reveals his perspective on the human degradations of the Iraq War. Working directly at the scene, Gittoes uses visual culture as a medium of critique, in his excoriating images of pain and terror, national hubris, and the cultural construction of warmongering identities. This artwork delivers another type of counter-discourse on how people are caught in the war on terror paradigm.

Anna Gibbs tackles the horrifying images from Abu Ghraib, examining the affective conditions implicit in their production, reception and circulation. Drawing on a range of resources including neurology, horror film and psychology, she reopens the question of how images of others’ suffering are consumed in the West.

Stacy Takacs maps how U.S. entertainment programming, after 9/11, aimed to convince a non-combatant audience of its intimate involvement in the war on terror. Takacs finds that these generic programs are also a site for articulating anxiety and resistance about the war on terror. Many of the programs dramatise failures of counter-terrorism, suggesting some ambivalence about the national agenda, and feature non-traditional gender roles, thus problematising the emblematic figure of September 11, 2001, the fireman.

Deborah Staines critiques the heroisation of a flight attendant in online memorial sites. Staines explores and theorises the constellation of patriotism, femininity and remembrance associated with Betty Ong, a flight attendant on Flight 11, who was killed when her passenger aircraft was driven into the World Trade Center, New York.

Jeff Lewis and Belinda Lewis examine Indonesia’s recent transition to civil society, specifically within the context of the Balinese community responses to the October 2002 bombings. Drawing on their long association with the island culture, and a quantitative study they conducted there, they look at the local complex social and political tensions which situate the bombings. They map the interaction between various modes of social perspective, cosmology and political action, against the local cultural theoretic of social harmony. This reads what has been accepted as an act of global terrorism in relation to issues based in a regional society and culture.

Ben Saul brings readers up to the present day in his review of contemporary international counter-terrorism laws (some still in draft form) and recommendations for future changes in law. Saul shows that the international community has consistently failed to define or criminalize “terrorism” in
international law, and there is not yet any discrete concept of terrorism in customary international law. His chapter first explores the policy reasons for defining and criminalizing terrorism, before proposing the basic elements of an international definition of terrorism.