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Performance, Politicians, and War:

Selling Iraq in the Culture War

'Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas?' (Joseph Stalin, as cited in Law, 2006: vi)

'[T]he battle for Iraq is now central to the ideological struggle of the 21st Century […] We will not allow the terrorists to dictate the future of the 21st Century.' (George W. Bush, as cited in Memmott, 2006)

In his book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), Slavoj Zizek posits that Western liberal democracies throughout the 1990s operated under the illusion that politics had become only 'the art of expert administration, that is […] politics without politics' (Zizek, 2002: 11), and that this illusion was shattered by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As the above epigraph suggests, overt ideological conflict is now clearly a key feature of the public work of politics. [1] It is notable that this 'ideological struggle', this battle for ideas, is taking as its central battleground an ongoing military conflict occurring at a significant physical distance from the overwhelming majority of those engaged in the ideological struggle within Australia and the United States. As US President George W. Bush has recently pointed out, control over the manner in which the war in Iraq can be thought, justified, and represented has become central to this battle of ideas. Following Joseph Stalin's maxim, Bush completes his statement by denying ground to both his military and ideological opponents, simply by rhetorically conflating the two.

Why should he allow academics, activists and artists to have weapons like ideas, particularly when the grounds of the ideological struggle are not simply the war in Iraq but also the ability to define the truth and reality of the twenty- first century? This paper is concerned with this ideological struggle around the war in Iraq as part of what has been regularly described in Australia as the 'culture wars', in which Prime Minister John Howard has recently claimed victory. [2] This paper examines a variety of claims for truth and reality taken from recent Australian political discourse, in particular those used to sell and to justify the ongoing war in Iraq. In these claims, as I will argue in this paper, what is seen to be real and what is able to be thought are strictly delimited to the ideological grounds of the speaker, with any attempts to oppose such claims being framed as either hopelessly

unrealistic, immoral, or actively traitorous. This paper also examines the ways in which claims made in the ideological struggle around the war on Iraq have been theatrically redeployed in Sydney-based performance group version 1.0's *The Wages of Spin* (2005/2006), a project in which the author was a collaborating artist. [3]

Postmodern Politicians in the Schoolyard

One of the primary battlegrounds of the various ideological struggles that define the culture wars is that of public education, as can be clearly seen in the recent attacks on what Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop has described as the 'Maoists' who control the school curriculums across Australia. [4] The schoolyard seems an unlikely location for ideological struggles over the rightness of the War on Iraq, but a number of skirmishes have occurred within this territory. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, for example, in selling the case for the war on Iraq in a speech to the Sydney Institute in February 2003, justified the war as a moral imperative necessary to defend the intellectual innocence of Australian school children, stating that:

> One of my departmental staff told me a story the other day about his little boy, a seven year old. The boy asked about weapons of mass destruction. He said they had been talked about in the playground at school. The boy went on to ask what would have happened if the terrorists in Bali had used such weapons, instead of a car bomb. It is disturbing enough that our young children should have such a sophisticated understanding of threats to our security. It is worse still that they should have such thoughts occupy their minds and imaginations, even in a playground at school. We owe it to them that such thoughts can be banished, and that they can be left to indulge their innocence and youth. We must stop the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons to countries such as Iraq. […] Only then can we consider that the threat of terrorists armed with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons - the ultimate nightmare – has also been diminished. (Downer, 2003)

In Downer's view, one of the primary purposes of the war in Iraq is to protect Australian children from the thought of threat. [5] Weapons of mass destruction are therefore, in Downer's view, doubly threatening when they threaten to pollute the innocence of the Australian childhood imaginary, in the inviolable space of the school playground. This notion of the threat to children has been a regular trope in the 'enemy formation' of much recent Australian political discourse in the culture war, with examples ranging from 'children overboard' to the recent battles over the kinds of thoughts that children should be exposed to in both the high school English syllabus and the teaching of history. [6] As the Prime Minister commented in January 2006 on the teaching of Australian history:

> I believe the time has also come for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools […] Too often, it is taught without any sense of structured narrative, replaced by a fragmented stew of ‘themes’ and

> 'issues'. And too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated. (Howard 2006) [7]

Both Australian values and history have, in the Prime Minister's view, been polluted by postmodern thinking, a confused excess of criticism and relativism that has somehow disabled the ability of children to be proud of their nation.[8]

If children are unable to be proud of their nation, then how might they be able to have faith in the inherent moral rightness that justifies Australian military actions such as the War in Iraq? As the title of a recent essay by John Birmingham states, this is indeed 'a time for war' (Birmingham, 2005), and the culture warriors of the right imply that a real, unbiased education system should not only reflect, but also celebrate this fact. The educational fear that Howard mobilises is a threat from within, a threat of thought, and a threat to the purity of the national character and its fundamental values. This threat is different in kind but no less real for the right as the thought of weapons of mass destruction allegedly possessed by Saddam Hussein that Downer claimed directly endangered Australian children in their school playgrounds.

The focus on postmodernism and Howard's identification of his ideological opponents as promoting a 'postmodern culture of relativism' is of immense interest, as Howard himself seems to have learnt the lessons of postmodern theory very well. While Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* defined postmodernism as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv), in this instance the Prime Minister redeploys postmodernism as a hostile meta-narrative to be incredulous toward. The fact that he is able to achieve this by using much else of Lyotard's descriptions of the postmodern condition (such as focusing on language games, undermining belief in the security of "reality", and drawing attention to the discourses that construct the meta-narratives of others) is nothing short of extraordinary. As Lyotard states, 'the postmodern artist or writer' – to which I will add Prime Minister Howard – 'is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment' (Lyotard, 1984: 81). In all Howard's warring rhetoric, nothing can be judged by old criteria such as truth and falsehood, responsibility and accountability. The preestablished rules no longer apply because the world has changed. As a consequence, the Prime Minister suggests, we must all continually be moving on, you are either with us or you are with the terrorists, Iraq is without a doubt a better place now so its time to get real. Anyone who questions the legitimacy of the war in Iraq either isn't living in the real world, or is actively in league with the enemy. As Howard stated in an interview on ABC TV's *Lateline* program in March 2006:

> I mean, the people who criticise the coalition, carry the burden of explaining and defending the proposition that it would have been better for Saddam to have gone on running Iraq. […] that's not in any way to downplay my concern about what is happening. But I think what it underlines is that whenever you criticise what the coalition did, what I did

> and what President Bush and Prime Minister Blair did, you have to be prepared to defend the alternative (as cited in Jones, 2006).

The only possible alternative to what the Coalition of the Willing have done in Iraq, Howard suggests, is for Saddam Hussein to have remained in power in Iraq. This strictly delimited alternative is so unthinkably unreal that it is not even worth entertaining. Critics of the Coalition of the Willing are, in the Prime Minister's view, offering no legitimate contributions that help the reality of the situation in Iraq, merely offering unsubstantiated unreal non-alternatives, 'some kind of undefined benign third way that would have delivered a change of regime and none of the difficulties of past weeks and months' (ibid.). The tough choices need to be faced by someone who can be trusted to deal with the reality of the situation, not to drift off into daydreams, no matter how benign they might be. Howard's conviction in the rightness of his warring actions is, in this and many other public statements, unshakable, to the point of declaring that: 'I still believe history will judge it to have been the right thing to have done' (ibid.). Given the Prime Minister's demonstrated investment in vigorously controlling the framing and teaching of history, his claim for historical justification may well be proved correct. [9] History is, after all, customarily written by the winners, and Howard has, as I noted earlier in this paper, already declared victory in the culture wars.

Allowing Facts to Speak Within Ideological Struggle

The culture war waged by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and those often aggressively pro-government mainstream media commentators (including, but by no means limited to Gerard Henderson, Piers Ackerman, Janet Albrechtsen, Tim Blair, Andrew Bolt, and Miranda Devine) continually frame their arguments as appeals to reality, making claims for their moral superiority because they possess privileged access to reality, and further claiming that their superior reality is intimately entangled with the true and good Australian nation. [10] Ideological claims to reality made in this culture war actively deny reality as a ground for any opposing arguments, despite being frequently revealed to have been constructed upon falsehoods.

According to these culture warriors, the reality is that even when there may have been mistaken facts, there have never really been falsehoods, lies, or deceptions. As former Defence Minister Robert Hill stated in defence of pre-War on Iraq intelligence about Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction: 'It was not an issue of a lie, it was an issue of finding out what the facts were.' (*Official Committee Hansard*, 2005: 127)

The facts used to constitute reality within the ideological struggle over the War on Iraq seem to expand and contract to fit the ideological needs of the moment. There were no weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq, despite vigorous arguments from culture warriors that anyone who didn't believe such claims couldn't possibly be living in the real world. An example of such a claim is Alexander Downer's response to the mass protests against the Iraq war in February 2003, in which he made claim not only for a privileged access to reality, but also a responsibility to act upon this, stating that:

> This past weekend many Australians – in legitimate, peaceful protest – have voiced their concern about a war with Iraq. We respect their opinions – indeed, the Government shares the desire of Australians for a peaceful end to the situation in Iraq. […] But we have a responsibility to deal with the facts, and the facts speak for themselves. (Downer, 2003)

This burden of responsibility to the facts clearly sits very heavily upon the Foreign Minister. In her book *Information War: American Propaganda, Free Speech and Opinion Control Since 9/11* (2003), propaganda theorist Nancy Snow discusses the efforts of advertising guru Charlotte Beers, appointed by Secretary of State Colin Powell to sell the United States as a brand to a hostile international market by allowing 'the facts to speak for themselves' (Snow, 2003: 90), a remarkably similar notion to Downer's treatment of the facts. In the context of the war on Iraq, it seems that the facts have often required considerable assistance to make sure that when they speak for themselves they deliver the correct message to their target audience.

In the moments where the facts fail at speaking in the desired manner (by themselves or otherwise), the realities constructed by culture warriors begin to unravel. The threat to victory in the ideological struggle caused by this reality collapse is usually contained by the culture warriors through skillful acts of frame-shifting in which the rhetorical constitution of reality is altered. For example, after the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was confirmed, it was insisted by the culture warriors that the war was never really about weapons of mass destruction, but actually always about producing freedom and democracy for the oppressed peoples of Iraq by removing an evil dictator. As US Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated in an interview with *Vanity Fair*, weapons of mass destruction were only used as a justification for war for 'bureaucratic reasons'. (Tannenhaus, 2003) Anyone who might argue with this is seen as being either unable to deal with the real fact that Iraq is really better now that it's free, or of being directly in league with Saddam Hussein. Like words for Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, reality means whatever the culture warriors want it to mean, nothing more, and nothing less. [11] Reality is the battleground of the culture war, and truth is indeed the first casualty of this, as with other wars. Reality expands and contracts in direct relation to the topic at hand, and truth is never allowed to get in the way of a really good story, especially if control over reality is the subject of this story. As dramaturg Paul Dwyer observed in the program notes for version 1.0's earlier performance *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident):* 'In politics, as in theatre, fiction often does play more powerfully than truth.' (Dwyer, 2004)

In his book *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact* (2005) philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes such culture warriors as 'reality fundamentalists', noting that in their scramble to control reality when the facts speak against them, the ideological enemy is always to blame for everything, because even though they might have the correct facts, they themselves have no moral claim to control reality:

> The reality-fundamentalists equip themselves with a form of magical thinking that confuses message and messenger: if you speak of the

> simulacrum, then you are a simulator; if you speak of the virtuality of war, then you are in league with it and have no regard for the hundreds of thousands of dead. Any analysis other than the moral is condemned as deluded or irresponsible. (Baudrillard, 2005: 23)

While Baudrillard is in this passage obviously defending his controversial book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995), his analysis also reflects recent Australian political discourse around the war on Iraq. The field of the moral is one upon which the neo-conservative culture warriors feel comfortably in control. The Prime Minister, for instance, when asked about whether he felt any sense of responsibility for the current suffering in Iraq as a result of a war entered on false pretenses, stayed clearly upon this ground, declaring categorically that, 'I am prepared to defend what I did on moral grounds' (as cited in Jones, 2006). As David McKnight notes in his book *Beyond Right and Left: New Politics and The Culture Wars* (2005), 'the Right's method of fighting the culture war is about framing the issue of politics as *moral* politics' (McKnight, 2005: 141, italics in original). The reality of these culture warriors may not be as factually based as they initially claimed, but it is more real, more trustworthy, and best of all more moral than that of their ideological opponents. With such a secure claim upon morality, re-framing facts to help them transform what can be seen as reality can be seen as totally justifiable, a necessary minor transgression, a little white untruth in the service of a morally greater truth. [12]

The Wages of Spin

These acts of re-framing facts in order to help them speak for themselves in such a way to support specific claims for reality are most often described as 'spin'. In his book *Sexing it Up: Iraq, Intelligence and Australia* (2003), Geoffrey Barker describes the spin used to sell the war on Iraq as 'a constant drumbeat of suggestion, allegation, insinuation, threat and promise' (Barker, 2003: 104), further noting that the use of this spin sought 'to raise political leaders above the messy business of politics. Their policies and actions are presented as selfless, non-sectional, concerned exclusively with "the national interest."' (Barker, 2003: 107) It is this process of spin applied to the War on Iraq that is the subject of Sydney-based performance group version 1.0's performance *The Wages of Spin*. Promotional material for the performance describes it in the following terms:

> *The Wages of Spin* provokes a closer examination of the issues at the core of the controversy surrounding the 'intelligence' reports that were the deciding factor in Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq. […] The production's […] script re-examines Senate Committee proceedings, often cheekily using the Hansard transcript verbatim as a theatrical device that leaves audiences asking: What should we believe? Further provoking the audience to question the authenticity of information, and the 'word' of those in power, is the production's clever re- contextualization of official public documents, television interviews and even raves from columnists & webloggers. This production asks: Does it matter that we went to war on a lie? (version 1.0, 2006).

The Wages of Spin charts the intersections of the real War on Iraq, taking place at a great physical distance to Australia, and the culture war within Australia, within which, as I have argued throughout this paper, the conduct of and justifications for the War on Iraq has proved an important theatre. The performance attacks many of the culture warriors by using their own pro-war rhetoric, aiming to prise apart the seamless weave of this highly spun discourse and make visible its constant re-framing of the facts to help shift what can be seen as reality. The work performs a similar operation to that which gender and cultural theorist Judith Butler called for in a critical practice of war photography in her recent public lecture *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), a practice that makes the frame that constructs the discourse of the image visible within the image itself. In *The Wages of Spin*, the devising company was visibly obsessed by framing, particularly of the interface between the screen-image, the rhetoric of culture war, and the body of the citizen/performer. *The Wages of Spin* attempted to achieve this by layering representation, by simultaneously presenting multiple channels of signification in order to allow audiences to find new ways of reflecting upon these often very familiar textual and video source materials.

***Wages of Spin*. Photographer Heidrun Lohr.**

The performance opens with a debate between Labor Senator John Faulkner (David Williams) and then-Defence Minister Senator Robert Hill (Stephen Klinder) from a Senate Estimates Committee of February 2005. The subject of the debate is an interview on ABC TV's *Four Corners* program with former Australian intelligence officer and weapons inspector Rod Barton, who alleged that Australians (that is to say himself) were directly involved in interrogating Iraqi prisoners of war, despite official Australian denials of this fact, notably from Senator Hill. A key point of Barton's objection to governmental denials

was the fact that he had reported his involvement in Iraqi interrogations directly to the Defence Department, a fact of which Senator Hill would almost certainly been aware. [13] The performance text focuses upon framing, demonstrating a government minister attempting to fit facts together in order to support a specific view of reality. There had been no possibility of governmental deception, argues Senator Hill, as the statements he made to parliament were correct. There were no Australians involved in interrogations in Iraq, as Mr Barton was merely conducting interviews not interrogations:

> The mere fact that somebody turns up at an interview in an orange jumpsuit, accompanied by an armed guard, does not make the interview an interrogation. It might sound odd to us, but that is American operating procedure. (*Official Committee Hansard*, 2005: 111, as cited in version 1.0, 2006a) [14]

The semantic nicety separating the two concepts in the language games of the Senators is thrown into sharp relief in the theatre by the concurrent performance of an actually dangerous, task-based action, that of performer Stephen Klinder being navigated blindfolded through a field of large sharp nails by the quiet, matter-of-fact instructions of another performer (Katy Green). The progress of Klinder's feet through the field of nails is followed in extreme close-up by a video camera whose image feed is projected onto a large screen upstage. This audience, having been informed in the foyer that they need to enter 'the studio' quietly as filming is already commenced, are made to walk past the scene in order to reach their seats at the other end of the stage, becoming temporarily incorporated into the stage picture. It is a delicate act to produce spin in such a high stakes environment – both Senator Hill and the performer re-speaking his words must literally or metaphorically tread carefully in this exchange, guided only by the words of an anonymous advisor. As one review of the performance put it, '[b]y believing everything he's told, he never suffers any personal pain' (Buzacott, 2006).

A sense of reality is clearly amplified here by visual framing, and the affective intensity of the image of Klinder's foot almost being impaled upon one nail after another builds almost unbearably as the scene continues for nearly ten minutes. The anxiety-inducing, extreme close-up image is further amplified when being read in conjunction with the frequently visible shakiness of the blindfolded performer's balance as he both traverses the nail field and maintains Hill's torturous verbal flow of spin. The mediated amplification of the relation between foot and nails has the effect of emphasising both the excessively dangerous material fact of the nails, and the vulnerability of the performer's flesh in relation to them. Like the war occurring in Iraq, however, this potential injury will happen to someone else. Despite a level of visual discomfort, the audience, like the Australian public generally, is safe, watching from a distance in the dark.

The performance doesn't let the audience off the hook that easily, however. The last section of the nail field is so densely packed with nails that it seems impossible for it to be traversed safely. Before Klinder reaches the end, however, the camera crew begin dismantling the image set-up, leaving Klinder standing blindfolded and alone onstage. Another camera, on

a wheeled tripod directed toward the audience, begins to be wheeled across the front of the stage, and the large screen slowly cross-fades from the close-up of Klinder's foot to a tracking close-up shot of the faces of individual audience members. At first, these audience members don't seem to realise that they are looking at themselves. Initially uncomfortable, the audience members begin to point at their own screen representations and those of their friends.

As the camera continues to track across stage, it finds another performer (Deborah Pollard in 2005, Kym Vercoe in 2006) in the centre of the audience. She begins to deliver a text comprised of a series of letters to the editor from the lead up to the 2004 Australian federal election, each extolling the worth and value of the doomed Opposition Leader Mark Latham. With the benefit of hindsight, the performance reveals the desperately misguided hope invested in these sentiments.

***Wages of Spin*. Photographer Heidrun Lohr.**

The music builds against her as she grows in volume, becoming a struggle to get the message out. The camera zooms out to capture an image of the entire audience, and the duelling text and music are cut abruptly. In the sudden silence Klinder, who has been waiting onstage throughout, has the hooded blindfold removed from his head. Oriented so that he is faced upstage, Klinder begins to address the projected image of the audience as if he were a TV studio warm-up guy. Like the always-inadequate narrators in Sheffield-based theatre company Forced Entertainment's performances *Showtime* (1996) and *Hidden J* (1994), Klinder seems woefully unsuitable for the task that he is suddenly faced with. After the high stakes danger of the blindfolded nail interrogation, this seemingly simple task to entertain the audience appears to be much too much for him. His desperately unfunny

jokes fall flat, and the timing of his comic punctuation – a couple of awkward boom-booms to supposedly let the audience in on the joke – is continually off. The poor form of his attempts to make sure that the audience is having a good time is further handicapped by the fact that he can only address the image of the audience, not the people themselves.

As Keith Gallasch observes in his review of the production: 'the effect of the inversion on the audience is palpable with the realisation that we've been "mediated", mere cyphers of ourselves' (Gallasch, 2005). The absurdity of this mode of address is amplified by Klinder's continual attempts at visual jokes which the audience cannot possibly see, including a demonstration of how the audience should smile, culminating in him throwing Minties into the crowd on the projection screen. As they crash uselessly on the floor in front of him after bouncing off the screen, Klinder finally gets a laugh from the final failure of his struggle to perform. Somewhat encouraged but no less anxious, Klinder instructs the audience to applaud wildly for the camera, an applause that, he assures them honestly, will be used later in the show. In this at last, Klinder achieves a level of success. The audience is driven to an ever-higher level of enthusiasm by the onstage crew, clapping and cheering until the sound and image of their wild applause is drowned out by a recording of ecstatic cheers from the government election victory party from the 2004 federal election. The image cross fades to that of Prime Minister John Howard (David Williams), who begins speaking along with a recording of Howard's triumphant electoral victory speech, mimicking the timing and pauses but not the sound of Howard's voice. Like the screen image of the shaven-headed performer wearing a military uniform with the clearly visible name tag 'Williams', the sound of live voice is also clearly not Howard. Yet despite the *verfremdungseffekt*, the sound of the Prime Minister's voice placed in a new embodied context, is still powerfully disturbing, if only for the visceral wrong- ness of the vocal pattern with its new bodily stand-in. The audience, duped into playing their part, are left to contemplate the Prime Minister's rhetorical re-making of their nation, wrapped up in the rhetoric of passion, belief and pride:

> [T]his nation stands on the threshold of a new era of great achievement. This is a proud nation, a confident nation, a cohesive nation, a united nation; a nation that can achieve anything it wants if it sets its mind to it. And no Australian should ever shrink from a passionate belief in the ability and capacity of this nation, not only to provide a wonderful homeland for our twenty million people, not only to be a partner with our friends in our own region, but to be a beacon of democracy, of tolerance, of hope, and of achievement all around the world. (Howard, 2004, as cited in version 1.0, 2006a)

The performance demonstrates the power of spin to transform reality by placing facts into new contexts, in this case the fact of audience complicity in the staging of a simple action (the applause) being reframed as complicity with the ascendancy of Prime Minister Howard's re-visioning of Australia.

Trust Us, For We Have to Get Real

While version 1.0's *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* (2004) staged a coherent argument about the systematic dehumanisation of asylum seekers in Australian public discourse, *The Wages of Spin* is a performance of disorientations. [15] Any of the material that appears in the performance could have been spoken or written at any time since the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The performance presents a swirl of increasingly illogical positions, re-presenting with great weight and seriousness the arguments of culture warriors as they strive to reframe reality. This is what Ghassan Hage calls the discourse of paranoid nationalism – arguments filled with sound and fury, circling around false premises, and hollow rhetoric. Despite all this being the case, however, the arguments are delivered *as if* they make sense. The further strength of these arguments is that they presume to be no more than *common sense*. Only an idiot, and a traitorous idiot at that, could disagree with these arguments, the culture warriors argue. The arguments are passionately patriotic. The speakers are cunning, in control, and meticulous in their framing. [16] They wrap themselves in the national flag, setting themselves in defence of 'our' values – freedom, tolerance, and democracy – while reducing these terms to floating signifiers that can mean whatever they are required to. It is notable, however, that the actual ongoing war in Iraq and the way in which this war is used in the ideological struggle of the culture war seem to operate largely independently of each other. The reality of the war rarely impinges on the reality of the culture war. And yet the culture war takes reality – the 'real world' – as its subject. We have to get real, the culture warriors say. The world has changed. The nay-saying elites no longer live in the real world, and are therefore unable to see the good done in the name of Australia.

The performance ends with an extended projection of scrolling text listing recent incidents involving civilian deaths from the ongoing violence in Iraq. In front of the projected text, on the darkened stage, the performers stand facing upstage and begin delivering an interview between Prime Minister John Howard and *Lateline* host Tony Jones. When asked if he felt any responsibility for the continually escalating violence in Iraq following the 2003 invasion, Howard declared that he is prepared to defend what he did on 'moral grounds'. When pressed on the issue of responsibility for what now appears to be a civil war, he declares that: 'Well I don't resile from the decision that I took. I accept the responsibility and I'll continue to argue that what we did was correct' (as cited in Jones, 2006). No matter how forceful the facts contained in the relentless litany of civilian deaths scrolling on the screen behind, the Prime Minister is certain that his responsibility is only to those facts that prove him correct.

Most Australians believe that Australia went to war on a false premise. But so what? Saddam was a bad guy, wasn't he? Freedom and democracy are worth fighting for, aren't they? Australia is populated by good people, isn't it? Trust us, as Prime Minister Howard so regularly states, without any hint of irony. Trust us dear citizens, and we will tell you what is really real:

> So again I say to my fellow Australians, thank you for the enormous trust that you have placed in us. I said at the beginning of this election campaign

> that it was about trust, it was who the Australian people had trusted to manage the economy, to lead this nation at a time of international peril, who did the Australian people better trust to keep the budget strong, who did the people better trust to lead it. In the first part of the 21st century ... The Australian people have given their answer, we thank themfor that, and we start work immediately to justify and fulfill the trust that they have given to all of us tonight (Howard, 2004).

Truth and reality in this culture war often come down in the end to a matter of trust, a trust justified by possessing superior access to reality itself. Truth is unimportant, the culture warriors imply, for they have a superior access to reality, are more morally righteous, and are therefore more worthy of trust than their hopelessly unreal opponents. Trust in this culture war has therefore become a question of faith, a quasi-religious practice in which the 'reality fundamentalist' culture warriors, with their claims for direct and superior access to reality, play the role of the new, true prophets.

If, as US President George W. Bush suggests, 'the battle for Iraq is now central to the ideological struggle of the 21st Century' (as cited in Memmott, 2006), then this ideological struggle is very well entrenched. As this paper has argued, the stakes of this struggle are not only victory in the war in Iraq, but also the ability to define the truth and reality of the future within Australian democracy. It is for this reason that repeated acts by neo-conservative culture warriors such as Prime Minister Howard to frame and re-frame reality must not be taken on faith, but rather be actively and continually questioned, even when this questioning itself must also take the form of re-framing. Theatre works like *The Wages of Spin* suggest that perhaps the path of best resistance to the dominance of the neo-conservatives in this ideological struggle lies not simply in deploring the excesses of their efforts in reframing reality, but rather to use the same re-framing tactics against them. In re-framing the performance of neo-conservatives as they engage in acts of re- framing, theatrical performance offers an opportunity to make visible the rhetorical modes by which political actors use wars such as Iraq to perform ideological acts in order to consolidate domestic power. The fact that theatre must also re-frame the performance of politicians in order for it to be able to expose these politicians as they frame and re-frame truth and reality is not something that theatre artists should be overly squeamish about. As theatre scholar Carol Martin notes in a recent paper on documentary theatre, 'Governments “spin” the facts in order to tell stories. Theatre spins them right back in order to tell different stories' (Martin, 2006:14). Such opportunities to tell different stories, especially ones that might in some small way intervene in this ideological struggle, must be seized. After all, as Joseph Stalin stated: 'Ideas are more powerful than guns' (as cited in Law, 2006: vi). Armed with ideas arising from re-framing the performance of politicians, the theatre is well positioned to reinforce resistance to neo-conservative dominance in the culture wars.

Notes

[1] It is interesting to compare the similarities between Zizek 's assertion that the illusion of a 'post political' world has been dispelled (in his view by the shock of the Real produced by

terrorist attacks of September 11 and their aftermath) and Baz Kershaw's observation in the introduction to his book *The Radical in Performance* (1999) that 'in the capitalist democracies, confidence in the legitimacy of established political processes is in a state of continual crisis, and that, paradoxically, undermines any performance that aims to be politically oppositional: if few people really believe in the State then it is hardly worth attacking.' (Kershaw, 1999: 5-6) The crisis of belief that Kershaw identifies seems to me to be remarkably similar to the illusion that Zizek declares has been dispelled since September 11, and it is perhaps for this reason that increasingly in the last five years, politically oppositional performance has been invigorated and embraced, not undermined.

[2] The occasion for this victory claim was in a speech for the 50th anniversary celebration of *Quadrant* magazine on the 3 October, 2006. A transcript of this speech can be found online at: http://www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech2165.html. For a detailed discussion of the culture wars in Australia see McKnight, 2005.

[3] Disclosure: the author is a founding and current member of version 1.0, and has been in all of the company's work since 1998. For more about version 1.0, see www.versiononepointzero.com. *The Wages of Spin* by version 1.0. Revised and updated version opened Performance Space, Sydney, 9 August 2006. Performed by Stephen Klinder, Kym Vercoe, and David Williams; Outside eye and dramaturgy Yana Taylor; Dramaturgy Paul Dwyer; Video Artist Sean Bacon; Lighting and Production Simon Wise; Sound Artist Gail Priest; Performing Crew Katy Green, Dan Pardy, and Ingrid Sivertsen. Original version (2005) also devised by Deborah Pollard. Produced by Performing Lines for Mobile States: Touring Contemporary Performance Australia. *The Wages of Spin* sets out to make visible the ideological operation of rhetoric used to sell the war on Iraq. In taking this process of making visible as an opportunity for resistance, I am drawing on Philip Auslander's reading of Hal Foster in his essay 'Toward a Concept of the Political in Postmodern Theatre' (1987). While the political efficacy of this mode of 'resistant' performance has been strongly questioned, most notably by Baz Kershaw, who argues that the notion of resistance seems to be a 'curiously passive' political strategy (Kershaw, 1999: 74), I believe strongly that, given the strong investment in this culture war rhetoric to make invisible its ideological underpinnings by rhetorically rendering them as the only possible reality that can be thought, a return to a 'resistant' mode of postmodern political performance is not only advisable, but necessary. In such a context, resistance is not merely a passive gesture, but a critically enabling stance. In acts of re-making visible and providing counter realities, the theatre can provide a place for the work of politics to begin.

[4] The occasion for this statement was a speech to the History Teachers' Association of Australia on 6 October, 2006. A transcript of this speech can be found online at: http://www.dest.gov.au/Ministers/Media/Bishop/2006/10/B001061006.asp

[5] Given the frequent buffoonery evident in Downer's various ministerial performances, one might also suggest somewhat mischievously, that he might hope to protect children from the threat of thought as well.

[6] For more on the 'history wars' see Macintyre and Clark, 2003. For a more detailed exploration of the term 'enemy formation' see Zizek, 2002.

[7] Interestingly enough, the title of Howard's speech was 'A sense of balance', strangely reminiscent of the motto of aggressively pro-War on Iraq news outlet Fox News, 'Fair and Balanced'.

[8] Emphasis on values in recent culture war rhetoric often stages these values in terms of war, producing an Australia defined by war-like values (for example the forced deployment of ANZAC values in schools, with stories of mateship such as the heroic Simpson and his donkey, the subject of a compulsory poster to be displayed in NSW State school classrooms in 2005; and the Federal Government initiative, also in 2005, that paired new school funding to the 'voluntary' decision for government schools to erect flagpoles to display the national flag). For further discussion on the deployment of military assets to defend Australian values as well as Australian borders see Coorey, 2006.

[9] In addition to his comments on the teaching of history in January 2006, in August 2006 he established the $100,000 Prime Minister's History Prize.

[10] See for instance, Devine, 2005.

[11] Another recent example of such frame shifting in the face of reality collapse is the case of 'children overboard'. When it became clear in the Senate Committee tasked with finding the truth of the incident that there were indeed no children overboard, the frame was shifted by the introduction of the so-called 'fog of war', a concept which asserted that there was no possibility of ever finding what really happened in this incident because 'everything is real, but it is not real.' (*Official Committee Hansard*, 2002: 57)[12] For a discussion of the bad things needed to be done in order to ensure the survival and political dominance of the good state, see for instance, Ghassan Hage's essay 'Truth and Reality in Warring Societies' (2005).

[13] For more on this issue, see Barton, 2006 and Jackson, 2005.

[14] This text was originally spoken by Mr Ric Smith, Secretary of Defence and one of two staff assisting Senator Hill during the Senate Estimates hearings (the other was a Mr Michael Pezzullo from the Department of Defence), who also answered questions on this issue that were directed to their Minister. The three take turns in answering questions from Labor Senators John Faulkner and Chris Evans. In version 1.0's re-edit of this material, the number of players is reduced, with the material being spoken as a direct dialogue between Hill and Faulkner only.

[15] For more on version 1.0's *CMI*, see Dwyer, 2006, McCallum, 2006 and Williams, 2006.

[16] The meticulousness of neo-conservative framing in the culture war is the subject of several books by cognitive linguist George Lakoff, most notably *Don't Think of an Elephant* (2005).

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Editorial Note

Performance Paradigm issues 1 to 9 were reformatted and repaginated as part of the journal's upgrade in 2018. Earlier versions are viewable via Wayback Machine: http://web.archive.org/web/*/performanceparadigm.net