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### **Interrupting History: A Farewell to Arms<sup>1</sup>**

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This is an invitation to contribute to a special issue of Cultural Studies---Critical Methodologies on the theme, "Interrupting History." It invites social scientists and qualitative researchers to interrogate the ways in which the Bush administration launched a war based on false premises, lies and mis-truths. This is a call to arms, asking, "Can we interrupt history as it unfolds in front of us? If so how? If not, why not?"

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In his analysis of the Iraqi War, Ricks (2006, p. 4) asks how the U. S. government could launch a preemptive war based on misinformation. He observes that the war happened, in part because there were a series of systemic failures and major lapses in the American system, including: a confused intelligence system, a passive Congress, and the inability of the media to "find and present alternative sources of information about Iraq and the threat it ... did not present to the United States. It is a tragedy in which every major player contributed to the errors" (Ricks, 2006, p. 4).

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Ricks does not point a finger at the American social science community, but he could have. This community largely stood silent during the run-up to and the aftermath of the on-going Iraqi War. This special issue asks a series of questions, including:

- \*\* Could qualitative researchers and critical social scientists have acted differently?
- \*\* Could we have worked better with the journalists? How?
- \*\* Could we have better raised critical questions concerning the politics of truth and the ways in which truth, knowledge, intelligence and evidence are socially constructed?
- \*\* As members of various professional scholarly associations, could we have better contributed to the public discourse that protested the war?
- \*\* .Could we have openly challenged the ways in which this Administration manipulated information?
- \*\* How did we allow ourselves to be so silent?

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The politics of truth and evidence are at issue. The Bush administration manipulated information, intelligence and evidence. The firestorm surrounding the Downing Street Memo (Ricks, 2006, p. 39) reveals that the administration lied to the public and to the media. They fixed evidence and intelligence which would justify going to war. They made it very difficult for journalists to find and present alternative information that would challenge their arguments., They claimed that their critics were unpatriotic.

The war implemented the Bush administration's commitment to the principle of preemption, that is we will attack our enemies before they attack us (Ricks, 2006, p. 38). Suskind (2006) reveals that the playbook for the implementation of this policy was based on the One Percent Principle, or the so-called Cheney Doctrine.

Even if there is a one percent chance of the unimaginable coming due, act as if it is a certainty ... justified or not, fact-based or not, our response is what matters. We have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response. It's not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence. It's about our response ... our response is what matters. If there is even a one percent chance of the terrorists getting a weapon of mass destruction, we have to act as if it were a certainty (Suskind, 2006, p. 62).

There was a second playbook. It was based on the social construction of reality principle: A senior advisor to President Bush (Suskind, 2004, p. 51), described this principle, contrasting the so-called "reality-based community" --people who believe that solutions emerge from ... judicious study of discernible reality" (p. 51), with the Administration's world view:

That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality we'll act again creating other new realities, which you can study too ... We're history's actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do (Suskind, 2004, p. 51).

How do you respond to a statement such as this? Whose history are they creating? And for what ends? Who gave them this power? Who is holding them responsible for the consequences of their historical actions? If they do not like the effects of one reality, they create a new one, to which we must respond, living out the consequences of their experiments in reality construction.

With the Cheney doctrine and the social construction of reality principle in place, the Administration was free to implement the preemptive war strategy. If they believed there was a threat somewhere, all they had to do was construct the evidence that warranted preemptive action.

And this seems to be what they are about to do with Iran, including challenging the American intelligence community, because they are unwilling to make judgment calls about Iran and its threats to the U. S. One official is quoted as saying, "We're not in a court of law. When they there is no evidence you have to ask them what they mean, what is the meaning of the term 'evidence'?" (Mazzetti, 2006, p. A13),

Indeed. What is the meaning of this word in this current historical moment? These are the issues and challenges this special issue will address.

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### References

Mazzetti, Mark. 2006. "Some in G. O. P. Say Iran Threat is Played Down." New York Times, 24 August: A1, A 13.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Michael Giardina for his comments and suggestions.