

Media Disinformation on 9/11: Anatomy of a Hatchet Job: CBC Radio's "The Current" and Scholars for 9/11 Truth

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Global Research, August 29, 2006
29 August 2006

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Terrorism](#)

Most of us, I would guess, are well aware of the constructed nature of the news and news commentaries fed to us daily by the corporate or "mainstream" media. We're not surprised to find, in those cases where we have managed to obtain independent knowledge of a subject, that mainstream news stories are often only tenuously connected to what appears to have been the actual series of events. And we're coming to expect, on the part of the people who construct these news stories and tell us how to interpret them, an increasingly slender respect for such archaic notions as truth, rudimentary ethics, and intellectual integrity.

As Arundhati Roy puts it, "In the 'free' market, free speech has become a commodity like everything else—justice, human rights, drinking water, clean air. It's available only to those who can afford it. And naturally, those who can afford it use free speech to manufacture the kind of product, confect the kind of public opinion, that best suits their purpose."¹

Critical understanding of this kind has been assisted by the spectacular deconstruction in recent years of a whole series of major news stories, which have noisily disintegrated before our eyes—rather in the manner of those self-destructing public sculptures which enjoyed a brief vogue in the latter part of the twentieth century. When those Rube-Goldberg or Heath-Robbins-ish artifacts were exhibited by their creators, they clanked, grunted, heaved, threw off sparks, set themselves on fire, and eventually collapsed into smoking heaps of cogs, wires, pulleys and girders before appreciative audiences of avant-garde cognoscenti.

That's much what happened in 2003 and since to the corporate media's narratives about Saddam Hussein's fearsome weapons of mass destruction, about the supposed reluctance of Bush and Blair to go to war in Iraq, and their supposedly pure and democratic motives when they did. That's much what's happening now to the claims advanced by Israel to legitimize its renewed aggressions against the Palestinians and Lebanese (Hizbollah's "kidnapping" of two Israeli soldiers rather loses its steam as a *casus belli* once people learn about Israel's prior provocations—and about the fact that all the early Israeli statements and press reports identified the soldiers as having been on Lebanese soil when they were captured).² It's happening as well to two somewhat more complex stories that have, until recently, been managing to sustain themselves in the corporate media.

One of these is the story that George W. Bush actually won the 2004 presidential

election, and hence has some right to the office he continues to occupy.³ The other is the no less fraudulent story that the terrorist crimes of September 11, 2001 were perpetrated by a gang of Islamist fanatics led by a bearded Saudi in an Afghan cave—rather than being organized (and subsequently covered up) by civilian and military officials at the highest levels of the Bush regime.

Even if the general pattern is well known, one small further example of how the mainstream media typically operate may still be of some interest—not least because it provides an indication of the degree to which publicly-owned broadcasters have been swayed in the same direction as the rest of the corporate media by the often unsubtle pressures exerted on them by corporatist politicians. In the present case, the immediate operators are functionaries within the radio division of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which as a publicly owned broadcaster provides news that is still in some respects distinguishable from the offerings of the privately-owned media. But savage government cuts followed by internal reorganizations have effectively lobotomized much of CBC Radio's public affairs programming.

It would seem that the recent and ongoing public disintegration of the 9/11 story has been a matter of concern to CBC functionaries. Existing demolitions of the official 9/11 narrative have gained added weight in recent months from the public interventions of Professors James Fetzer and Steven Jones, co-founders of Scholars for 9/11 Truth, who together with other distinguished scholars and scientists who have joined this group, notably the theologian David Ray Griffin, have been publishing scrupulously researched studies of the 9/11 evidence—and have as well been making increasingly high-profile media appearances across the U.S.

Why should this concern the CBC? Because together with the rest of the Canadian mainstream media, the CBC has taken on the task of swinging Canadian public opinion into support for Canada's increasingly aggressive participation in the occupation of Afghanistan—a country that was bombed, invaded, and occupied by the United States in 2001 as punishment for giving refuge to Osama bin Laden, the man accused of masterminding the atrocities of 9/11. Obviously enough, if the real organizers of the 9/11 attacks were in fact senior officials of the U.S. government, then that opinion-molding project collapses into rubble.

CBC Radio's "The Current"

When I learned on August 17, 2006 that "The Current," CBC Radio's leading weekday public affairs program, intended to devote a major part of its time on the following day to "conspiracy theory" and the Scholars for 9/11 Truth, I emailed Anna Maria Tremonti, the program's host. Indicating my own awareness of "the converging conclusions both of many citizen-activists and of researchers from disciplines including mechanical engineering, physics, philosophy, and economics that the attacks of 9/11 were an inside job," I expressed hope that the program "[would] be treating scholarly investigative research into this subject with the seriousness it deserves."

I said that I assumed "The Current" would be interviewing one or the other of the co-founders of Scholars for 9/11 Truth, James Fetzer, McKnight University Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota, and Steven Jones, Professor of Physics at Brigham Young University. I noted that this group has some Canadian members (myself among them). And I ventured to add my opinion that "'conspiracy theory' is in most of its

applications a foolish term, which serves primarily to obstruct critical and scientific rationality”; a more helpful term, I said, might be “‘deception theory’—a notion whose roots in Western philosophical and literary culture go back to Plato and to early humanist textual criticism.”

Fishing for an interview? I think not: the program’s contents must long since have been finalized, and I don’t much like stints on radio or television.⁴ More probably, the teacher in me was working overtime. When one has devoted long hours to critically analyzing a subject, it’s hard to resist passing on some of what one knows.

On the afternoon of August 18, I received a boiler-plate response from Lisa Ayuso at “The Current.” Thanking me for sharing my thoughts on their programming, she informed me that they had interviewed Mark Fenster, provided the website address for the program’s “showlog,” and assured me that my comments would be forwarded “to the staff for their perusal.”

By the time I received this message, I’d already listened to the audio stream of the August 18th edition of “The Current” on the CBC’s website. The entire segment on 9/11 and “conspiracy theory” consisted of a single long interview with an academic whose work in the field of cultural studies I respect—but who was at once arrogantly dismissive of the Scholars for 9/11 Truth and quite astonishingly underinformed about the state of research into the events of 9/11. Since the staff at “The Current” were so amiably willing to peruse the opinions of their listeners, I thought I’d give them something more substantial to chew on. Here’s the text of my second missive, emailed on the evening of August 18.

A second letter to “The Current”

Dear Lisa Ayuso,

Thank you for your response.

I was able to catch Susan Ormiston’s interview with Professor Mark Fenster of the University of Florida this-morning, though only on the audio stream provided by your website—which tantalizingly omitted a couple of segments, making it impossible to guess what the debate involving a member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth that Ormiston and Fenster commented on might have consisted of.

I know Mark Fenster’s book ‘Conspiracy Theory’ (U of Minnesota Press, 1999): it’s an excellent piece of work, full of fine analyses of what Richard Hofstadter famously called “the paranoid style in American politics.” Fenster has illuminating things to say about subjects like ‘The X-Files’, the militia movement, Christofascist apocalyptic thought, and appalling conspiracy fictions like ‘The Turner Diaries’. As one might expect of someone with a Ph.D. in communications, he’s well up on contemporary literary and cultural theory, and deploys it interestingly.

But I can’t help wondering why Professor Fenster thought himself qualified to comment on current historical and materials-science research into the events of September 11, 2001, and why he thought it appropriate to conflate this kind of research with the popular-culture paranoia on which he is indeed an expert.

Fenster himself made a point of raising the issue of scholarly credentials when he said of

the Scholars for 9/11 Truth that “Their credentials are not quite at the level that one would expect for the sort of blue-ribbon panel—.” Starting his thought afresh, he continued, “And frequently they have expertise, but not necessarily in the areas in which they’re making arguments and making claims.”

Let’s follow up that thought. Fenster advanced some fairly strong claims in the course of his interview—not least in identifying the Scholars for 9/11 Truth as “conspiracy theorists.” As he knows, this is both a disabling rhetorical move and an insult. (In the introduction to his book ‘Conspiracy Theory’, he observed that in political discussion, “one can hurl no greater insult than to describe another’s positions as the product of a ‘conspiracy theory’.”)

Fenster somehow knows, then, that the analyses by credentialed physicists and mechanical engineers of the collapses of the Twin Towers and of WTC 7 that have been published on the website of the Scholars for 9/11 Truth (www.st911.org) and in the ‘Journal of 9/11 Studies’ are rubbish—on a level, one must presume, with crackpot speculations about the Illuminati, or anti-semitic fantasies about the ZOG’s black helicopters. And Fenster knows this even though some of these scientists’ 9/11 analyses have been peer-reviewed or refereed—which means that their evidence and arguments have been critically assessed and approved by other scientists and scholars with appropriate expertise.

On the basis of what expertise, I wonder, does Fenster arrive at a conclusion at once so definitive and so insulting?

I wouldn’t guess that he knows much himself about physics, or chemistry, or mechanical engineering. (In remarking on the debate over planned demolition involving an unnamed member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth, Fenster seemed to think that the presence of sulphur compounds in the ruins went against the evidence for demolition: sulphidation and intergranular eutectic melting of structural steel are actually signatures of thermate, which there are other reasons as well to think was used in the demolition of the World Trade Center towers).

Moreover, during his interview Fenster made it very clear that he also knows next to nothing about published research into the material and historical evidence we possess of the events of 9/11. He stated at one point that there was an interesting delay between those events and the point at which “conspiracy theory” interpretations of them began to appear: “the lag was about four to five years,” he said, adding that only after the 2004 U.S. election did conspiratorial interpretations of 9/11 begin to be produced.

Setting aside Professor Fenster’s difficulties with arithmetic (from September 11, 2001 to November 2nd, 2004 is actually just three years and a bit), what he was confessing here—though Susan Ormiston wasn’t up to noticing the fact—is that he’s been asleep at the wheel.

Here are just a few of the critical studies—all of them published prior to the 2004 election, and dealing partly or in whole with 9/11—that Fenster managed not to notice, and has presumably still not got around to reading:

Michel Chossudovsky, ‘War and Globalisation: The Truth Behind September 11’ (2002).

John McMurtry, ‘Value Wars: The Global Market Versus the Life Economy’ (2002).

Eric Hufschmid, 'Painful Questions: An Analysis of the September 11th Attack' (2002).

Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, 'The War on Freedom: How and Why America was Attacked, September 11, 2001' (2002).

—, 'Behind the War on Terror: Western Secret Strategy and the Struggle for Iraq' (2003).

David Ray Griffin, 'The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11' (2004).

Michael C. Ruppert, 'Crossing the Rubicon: The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil' (2004).

To these one might add Paul Thompson's '9/11 Timeline', an analytic compilation based wholly on material published in the mainstream media which has been available online, in ever-expanding versions, since 2002, and was recently published in book form.

Fenster might well not agree with some of the interpretations advanced by these writers (Professor McMurtry, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and internationally recognized philosopher, and Professor Griffin, an equally distinguished scholar who has published some two dozen books, are both members of the despised Scholars for 9/11 Truth, and therefore mere conspiracy theorists). But he might find it instructive to engage with the historical evidence—matters of undisputed public record—that are assembled and reflected on in these and other more recent studies of the 9/11 events and their aftermath.

Let me conclude with two suggestions.

I would propose, as a matter of caution if not of intellectual principle, that Professor Fenster make some effort to inform himself about the subject under discussion before he next chooses to make a fool of himself on Canadian national radio.

And I would suggest that the producers of "The Current" try to remember the CBC's distinguished past as a public and public-interest broadcaster. The network's reputation is not well served by programs which are so transparently designed to present one opinion only—and that opinion a singularly ill-informed one—on matters of major public and historical interest.

Yours sincerely,...

By way of coda...

Thinking on the evening of August 18 that my correspondence with "The Current" might be of interest to James Fetzer and Steven Jones, I forwarded them a copy of it—and heard back from Professor Fetzer almost at once.

"This is very interesting," he wrote. "'The Current' interviewed me (taped in advance) on Wednesday, 2 August"—for a program that "was supposed to be broadcast on Friday, 4 August, but was 'bumped' because of the new 'terrorist ring' break-up. I was told they would reschedule and let me know when it would run."

Fetzer thought this interview had gone very well—in part, he said, because he "took the host's questions apart." (For samples of Fetzer's polite but formidable command of the

facts, and of his astute explanations of the appropriate protocols of interpretation, see the links to his recent interviews with various U.S. broadcasters that are provided at the website of Scholars for 9/11 Truth: www.st911.org.) He found it interesting as well—perhaps amusing, if I’m not over-interpreting his brief message—that after spiking an interview that one might guess was a good deal too lucid and well-informed for the CBC’s taste, “The Current” then sought to bury the issue by bringing in another scholar, Fenster, whose name sounds vaguely similar.

So there we have it, folks: just a little something to mull over the next time we hear Anna Maria Tremonti or her clones pontificating on the War on Terror, the vital (if also vehemently unwanted) job that Canada’s soldiers are doing in bringing democracy-at-gunpoint to Afghanistan’s surly inhabitants, or the self-evident follies and inanities of 9/11 research.

It’s not simple ignorance we’re hearing over our national airwaves, but intentional and malicious ignorance; not stupidity alone, but intellectual dishonesty as well.

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1 Arundhati Roy, *War Talk* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2003), p. 78.

2 See Joshua Frank, “Kidnapped in Israel or Captured in Lebanon? Official justification for Israel’s invasion on thin ice,” *Antiwar.com* (25 July 2006), available at the *Centre for Research on Globalization*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=FRA20060725&articleid=2813>; Trish Shuh, “Operation ‘Change of Location’? How Reports of the July 12th Capture of IDF Soldiers Soon Shifted from Lebanon to Israel,” *Counterpunch* (15 August 2006), <http://www.counterpunch.org/schuh08152006.html>; and George Monbiot, “Israel responded to an unprovoked attack by Hizbollah, right? Wrong,” *The Guardian* (9 August 2006), available at the *Centre for Research on Globalization*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=MON20060809&articleid=2926>

3 Early challenges to this fiction included my article “The Strange Death of American Democracy: Endgame in Ohio,” *Centre for Research on Globalization* (24 January 2005), <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KEE501A.html>; more recent and more wide-ranging studies include Mark Crispin Miller, *Fooled Again* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Steven F. Freeman and Joel Bleifuss, *Was the 2004 Presidential Election Stolen?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006); and Greg Palast, *Armed Madhouse* (New York: Dutton, 2006), pp. 187-263.

4 You can blow the dust off a textual critic, but why torment him with microphones? Ruminative pauses that students might interpret as evidence of cogitation are just dead air to media audiences.

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