

Running head: MEDIATED DIALOGUE: HBO's *LIVE FROM BAGHDAD*

Graduate Student Paper

First WSCC Submission

Mediated Dialogue:

HBO's *Live from Baghdad*

Arthur W. Herbig IV

Kelly Parker

Master's Students at Saint Louis University

**Mediated Dialogue: HBO's *Live from Baghdad***

And I'll tell you exactly when they are going to die.

They are going to die when the talking stops.

(Robert Wiener, *Live from Baghdad*).

In her article about CNN's coverage of the Persian Gulf War, Zelizer (1992) argues that CNN choices changed forever how the media will cover war. The CNN coverage shattered broadcast news networks (Jensen, 2002). Zelizer tells us that CNN brought unprecedented objectivity to war coverage. The major networks NBC, CBS, and ABC reported stories on the evening news that CNN reported all day. In addition, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, the Pentagon, and other top US officials relied upon CNN for accurate, up-to-date information from Iraq (Rosenberg, 2002).

CNN's media revolution and the sudden impact of 24 hour news reporting from the Persian Gulf War are the focus of the film, *Live from Baghdad*, adapted by HBO from a book written by Robert Wiener (1992), the CNN executive producer in Iraq who was responsible for the unprecedented news coverage. As one of the screenwriters of the movie, Wiener brings to life the perils and questions posed by the media during this revolutionary coverage. The movie examines the roles media play in how the public understands and interprets broadcast news.

Many perspectives attempt to describe the role that media should play in the world (Carey, 1992) and remains a point of mixed contention (Kellner, 1995). In this paper we examine media roles in encouraging and mediating dialogue, since media criticism often neglects dialogue as one of its components (Hallin, 1994). In doing so we will explain *Live from Baghdad* to determine what it will tell us about public dialogue. Mediated public dialogue is important and essential in both conflict resolution (Baynes, 1994) and in establishing informed

opinions in democracy (Mathews, 1999). For this paper, we narrow our focus to public dialogue and the responsibilities of the media in order to gain a greater understanding of media mediated public dialogue. The goal is to understand the media, specifically television, and its role in the creation of this mediated public dialogue.

### Dialogue

Tannen (1998) argues that we are a “culture of critique, with its inclination to regard criticism and attack as the best, if not the only type of rigorous thinking” (p. 257). This may be true, but it does not mean that criticism and attack are the best way of thinking and making decisions. Dialogue has taken a back seat to two-sided argumentation in American culture. We polarize many issues such as abortion, race, and government although more than two sides exist.

Action must be one of the central goals of the public sphere, but Tannen (1998) warns us that it can come at the cost of dialogue. According to Buber (2000), a basic compassion must exist as the heart of dialogue. Buber refers to this compassion as the relational sphere. The relational sphere is when we turn towards another and recognize the other as a human being. In our relational understanding with men, Buber says, “The relation is open and in the form of speech. We can give and accept the *Thou*” (p. 22). *I-Thou* relationships require turning towards another person and accepting him or her as a whole person, including their ideas and knowledge. Buber gives us a foundation for achieving genuine dialogue through *I-Thou*, but we must realize that turning towards another does not mean giving up our own ideas and principles. Friedman (1994) advises that in dialogue we must bring our beliefs to the conversation or we are neglecting our responsibility to the process. He believes that our passion for ideas is a positive aspect of dialogue and through the expression of our ideas, new ideas are born.

Bakhtin (1993) agrees, advocating that dialogue between participants is the union of conversation with distinct perspectives. He sees the importance of action in dialogue and argue to reach “aesthetic activity,” similar to and *I-Thou* relationships, there must be an intent to “enter into communion” with someone (p. 1). He views dialogue as an umbrella under which all communication finds shelter. He also agrees with Buber in that he believes that it is through dialogical relationships, that we come to know ourselves. Bakhtin (1993) emphasizes the discursive element of language and its communal implication versus individual construction. Baxter’s (2003) interpretations of Bakhtin tell us that when we listen to others, we hear the voice of the speaker, the voice of the world as well as our own voice. In this respect, we cannot separate words apart from the multiple voices that speak them (Emerson, 1994), no matter the immediate presence or absence of the author (Anderson, 1994).

With a growing call to dialogue, it is important to understand the role it plays in society and how it functions (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). Dialogue allows for a wider breadth of ideas in the public sphere, so there are greater possibilities for resolution and an informed public (Mathews, 1999). For the purposes of this inquiry, we borrow from Buber’s (2000) realm of *Thou* as a principal factor in dialogue. However, we must practically look to Friedman’s (1994) role of confrontation, combined with Bakhtin’s multivocality. What emerges is a proactive dialogue with an opportunity for growth and new ideas, while acknowledging the importance of personal principles from all parties or voices involved.

#### Public Dialogue and the Role of Media

As Tannen (1998) points out, we begin to categorize and polarize opposing voices sacrificing true public opinion. In doing this, voices become muted to the detriment of the

greater good. The following section explores dialogue as it relates to the public sphere and politics, and the role of media, specifically television, within that dynamic.

The conversation on mass media has been evolving over the past decades. Media, as described by Carey (1992), provide new ways to create culture; however, not all views of media are so optimistic. From a Bakhtinian perspective, Newcomb (1984) tells us that roles of voice, language and resolution are important in understanding the role of dialogue in media. According to Habermas, the use of systematic communication to dominate or manipulate, “violates the conditions of trust and reciprocity essential to the achievement of shared meaning” (Hallin, 1987, p. 310). Habermas (1979) tells us that once an interpreter reproduces a message that message has a new symbolic meaning. The change in message must be looked at as a part of the new meaning. Hallin (1994) looks at how that change occurs in the media, as a translator of messages, and its effect in dialogue.

Hallin (1994) argues through implicit ideological domination, media perpetuates a system that prohibits public dialogue and therefore, cannot play a role in initiating active public participation to decide the course of public policy. Ferrarotti (1988) also sees media as detrimental to conversation. His view, along with Hallin (1987), is that media narrows opinion because they are a small group with an economic interest, making decisions of what is important to view. This small group usually consists of executives from corporate conglomerates who control various media outlets including television networks, newspapers and radio stations. Evans concurs, stating, “Instead of being participants in dialogue, we are increasingly becoming audiences and markets” (2001, p. 776).

Baynes (1994) recognizes Habermas’ criticism of ideological institutions and suggests that although there are problems with modern media, great potential also exists. Kellner (1995),

as a critical theorist, identifies what could come from a new and growing media and makes the case for a closer look at the politics of media. He sees the economics of television and commodity driven media, and recognizes a chance for democracy. The development of communication technologies could decentralize information and widen public opinion. As media evolve, these modern technologies could provoke conversation and open participation. On the other hand, Evans (2001) cites Dewey's concern over the growth of communication technologies leading to a curtailment of opportunities for conversation, dialogue or debate, all of which are main components of democracy. Evans says that individual voices are essential to democracy and must be heard.

Although media are responsible for reporting facts, that is not their only responsibility (Botes, 1996). We expect media to have many functions including "gathering facts about issues that may affect us, helping set the political agenda, providing opportunities for discussion and debate among candidates for office and policy advocates, holding public officials to account, providing incentives for citizen involvement, among others" (Evans, 2001, p. 778). Roeh and Cohen (1992) say that media have a responsibility to their audience to report objectively. Botes (1996) says objectivity is extremely important as media, specifically journalists, fulfill the role of intermediaries in conflict resolution. Her research shows that if reporters remain independent of the parties within the conflict, then they can be part of the resolution by providing an arena for both direct and indirect dialogue.

Young (1991) identifies numerous roles of media in international conflict. Media, such as television, can ignite conflict escalation by the simple presence of cameras. Media can also contribute to conflict de-escalation, by making communication with the opposing side accessible to the public. This allows for the public, as well as government or lawmakers, to see the other

side as human beings (Manoff, 1998). Many times media also serves as a channel of communication between leaders, governments, terrorists, and constituencies. However, the traditional role of media is to dispense information to the public such as confirmation of official accounts, reveal deceit and correct errors of omission necessary in making good decisions.

### Television

Media also has the power to frame issues for the public to consume (Manoff, 1998), and has the capacity to change public opinion (Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002). Television, particularly television news, is an “ideological medium, providing not just information or entertainment, but ‘packages of consciousness’—frameworks for interpreting and cues for reacting to social and political reality” (Hallin, 1994, p. 90). People see themselves vicariously participating in the political process by watching television (Buckingham, 1999). However, Hallin would argue that it is these “people” that make dialogue impossible; arguing that dialogue gets drowned out due to feedback. Television journalists pay attention to the polls and subsequently tell the audience what they want to hear; the cycle perpetuates, until no one can hear anything.

With that in mind Olsen (1994) claims that instead of emphasizing individualism, television “closes society, makes it more proximate, more oral, less linear, less visual, less compartmentalized, less nationalistic” (p. 69). Fiske and Hartley (1989) believe that television viewing is extremely active and “functions as a social ritual, overriding individual distinctions, in which our culture engages in order to communicate with its collective self” (p. 85). In fact, Fiske and Hartley compare television viewing to the role of the medieval bard. The bard was in charge of mediating language as needed by a culture, situating him or herself at the center of cultural activity, communicating orally, and perpetuating myths.

Research shows that the more that the more people watch television, the more television influences people (Parenti). One reason is that television assists in creating a social reality by informing us about cultures viewers may have never experienced. By bringing other cultures into our living rooms, television not only gives us content information, but relational information as well. “The news tells us not only what happened in the world today, but who we are in relation to that world” (Hallin, 1994, p.20).

### Media Representation In *Live From Baghdad*

President George H. W. Bush made a declaration in August of 1990, drawing a “line in the sand” over Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait (Thrall, 2000, p. 1). Thrall (2000) claim that the Persian Gulf War was the most highly accessible war in history. CNN’s role in the coverage was integral. In fact, the CNN coverage changed how Americans look at the news forever, while also establishing itself as the world’s leader in news coverage (Zelizer, 1992). This media landscape is a focal point of the movie *Live from Baghdad* and has been discussed in many scholarly circles (Carruthers, 2000; Liebes, 1992; Young, 1991; Zelizer, 1992).

Thrall (2000) takes the very strong position that the government controlled media during the Persian Gulf War. In the media’s haste to get the story first, they were all too eager to air whatever the White House provided. He believes that media fought a battle to cover the war because the military and the White House openly prevented them from getting insider information. They controlled what information would be reported and when. To get the “true” story, without the restrictions of the US government or military, journalist had to report from Baghdad.

He goes on to argue that CNN quickly became the leader in news from Baghdad because of its 24-hour format. Also, with the permission of the Iraqi government, CNN was the only

news organization allowed a piece of equipment (a four wire) that put them in direct contact with their bureau in Atlanta. When war broke out, all the other news organizations lost their communication, but CNN stayed live. CNN continued to report on the war, showing both American successes and Iraqi casualties. Their presentation of the war angered American politicians, but CNN persevered. At times, some politicians even questioned the patriotism of lead correspondent Peter Arnett.

*Live from Baghdad* is the story of the events leading up to and during the first day of attacks on Iraq by the United States from the perspective of the CNN crew sent to cover the story from Baghdad (Rosenberg, 2002). It is a docudrama based on the book written by Robert Wiener (1992), the CNN executive producer who covered the story, and who takes partial credit for writing the screenplay (Rosenberg, 2002). *Live from Baghdad* is a non-fiction event presented in a fictionalized way. There is some questioning of what facts were presented in the movie, and the lack of media critique (Ralske, 2002), but the movie was received with rave reviews (Buckman, 2002; Kelleher, 2002; Ralske, 2002; Rosenberg, 2002) including Golden Globe and Emmy nominations. Kelleher reveals, “You’ll feel the news team’s adrenaline rush when the bombs start falling...Bottom Line: Hot Story.” Rosenberg echoes these sentiments saying, “Fresh reenactments with 1991 news footage in a story as snappy as a CNN sound bite...Michael Keaton has Wiener launching wise cracks like Patriot missiles.”

The movie tells the stories of the crew and the perils of being in the line of fire (Rosenberg, 2002), but there is also quite a bit of talk about media’s role in dialogue. The film offers instances of dialogue in addition to commentary about public dialogue. There is a major gap in communication on dialogue’s role in the media. The intent of this study is to examine that gap as well as explore the role of media that is being presented in the movie. We will take into

account our view on dialogue to explore media's role in that model, as well as look at the movie's attempt to show effects on the public sphere. Robert Wiener has put together his take on the role of CNN in process leading up to the Persian Gulf War and it has inspired us to ask; is it the goal of media to create public dialogue; and, what voices are present and absent in the media messages used to facilitate public dialogue?

### **Analysis**

In this paper we have taken Baxter's (2003) interpretations on how Bakhtin uses voice to analyze what is occurring in this movie. It should be noted that this is significantly different from how Bakhtin and Medvedev (1985) do literary criticism and how Newcomb (1985) adapts that type of criticism to television. Bakhtin (1993, 1985) provides us with multiple ways to look at dialogue. Baxter (2003) identifies eight different ways that Bakhtin uses voice to talk about the interplay of dialogue in his work. Through Baxter's (2003) interpretations of those voices we will try to identify the ones that are at work in this movie. By doing this we can we can gain insight into the role that dialogue plays in this movie, as a way to grasp the role of dialogue in this type of situation.

### **A Good Story**

In the beginning of the movie, the fledgling network CNN is involved in a financial restructuring, and the US is on the brink of war with Iraq. CNN is a 24 hour network looking for a 24 hour story and one has just happened. They send a crew to Iraq to report from inside Baghdad. Robert Wiener (Robert) and Ingrid Formanek (Ingrid) are the producers for the crew. When they make it to Iraq their first story is of a little boy being held hostage at Saddam Hussein's royal palace, although the Iraqis call the little boy simply a "guest". The movie then cuts to Robert and Ingrid in a dim, smoky bar drinking with reporters from other networks. The

story about Saddam's British hostages, or guests, has just aired on CNN. The text of the story is, "In the rest of the world they're called hostages, but here they're called 'guests.'" The reporters have a problem with the way CNN presented the story and the following is an excerpt taken from their conversation:

Ingrid: It was a good story  
 R3: It was bullshit.  
 Ingrid: No, it was minimum comment, maximum content. That's all.  
 R1: That is irresponsible. You let Saddam spout off his garbage without challenging it. You hand Hitler a microphone and you call it journalism.  
 R3: Where's the editorial point of view?  
 Robert: Where's trusting the viewer? They've got the ability to judge this stuff and they've got the right to see it.  
 Ingrid: Absolutely  
 R1: Oh, god.  
 R3: But, how can they know what they're seeing without some sort of context?  
 Robert: I don't need some big lead in. I know how I feel about a dictator who puts his hairy fuckin' hand on some little hostage boy. It's right there for anybody to see. Who are you to say what it means.  
 R3: Oh, come on.  
 R1: (Sighs)  
 (Scene cuts to the Robert and Ingrid alone in the bar, obviously drunk after it has closed)  
 Robert: Who are we to say what it means.  
 Ingrid: We didn't say what it means.  
 Robert: What do you think in means?  
 Ingrid: (Shrugs) Don't know what it means.  
 Robert: (Sighs) I'll tell you what it could mean. If we could get both sides talking...  
 Ingrid: Peace, love and understanding. Come on Wienerish, we're just the eyes.  
 Robert: Ya think?  
 Ingrid: We put the shit up there and they pull it down on their Sonys. I think I'm quoting you.  
 Robert: No, I said Zeniths. Oh man, are you drunk?  
 Ingrid: Yes.....The moment we become the story...  
 Robert: ...it's over. I know, I know, I know.  
 Ingrid: Fuck'em. It was a good story.  
 Robert: We're going to need another one tomorrow.

There are a number of voices at work in the movie's first foray into the role that the media plays in public dialogue. Of the voices that Baxter (2003) links to Bakhtin; the voice of the past, immediate speaker, present other, addressivity, context, social languages, and most

importantly the voice of the superaddressee are all evident. In that context, this section of the movie is a commentary on the roles that the media plays in the voices of the immediate speaker, or reporter, the present other, or story reported, and the superaddressee, or audience. In this section we explore how the movie negotiates those voices in getting the story to the audience.

If, as Newcombe (1984) argues, these characters represent a language in dialogue, when we combine that picture with Baxter's multivocality we see this scene with more clarity. These three reporters in the bar act as a chorus and a conscience for two of our main characters. Their language causes Robert and Ingrid to reflect on the role that they play in this conflict. The reporters see the story as lacking the information needed for the superaddressee to be informed, and in doing this CNN supports Saddam.

Robert and Ingrid have taken the voice of immediate speaker to impartially report the story of conflict in Baghdad and they spend most of their time trying to address the voice of the superaddressee. There are many voices present in those stories including voices of the Iraqi and United States government and the citizens of those countries. There are the voices of the reporters and producers, who see the best way to acknowledge the roles that all of those voices play as, "minimum comment, maximum content."

These journalists spent much time and care in the wording they used to report the Stuart Lockwood story. They acknowledged if they went too far one way the Iraqi government would throw them out of the country, but too far the other way and they would not be reporting the story for an American audience. The other reporters see this as letting, "Saddam spout off his garbage without challenging it." Their response is that the viewers have their own voice in the situation. This is the challenge that Roeh and Cohen (1992) explore in open and closed media. Robert and Ingrid believe they reported an open story for the audience to interpret. The reporters

at the bar would like to see more editorial comment, which provides more information, but closes interpretation.

This open-closed tension is a tight rope these producers must walk, but they stumble upon an even greater issue as they converse alone in the bar, “if we could get both sides talking...” To Ingrid that is not their role in this conflict. For her, It is their job to report the stories and leave them for the audience to interpret. Robert takes an approach that is more in line with Carey (1994). Robert sees his job as including a cultural responsibility. He sees his job as facilitating what each side has to say without becoming the story.

### **Ministry of Information**

After the night with Ingrid in the bar, Robert decides that the best thing he can do for himself, CNN, and the war is to score an on-air interview with Saddam. As Robert waits all day in the office of Naji Al Hadithi’s (Naji), the head of the Iraqi Ministry of Information, he notices an obvious lack of respect for the media. Reporters have come and gone all day; some are told that Naji is not there, while others are told to wait. Some of them are told that Naji is not there, some are told to wait. Robert is the only one who stays, and the only one who, when the opportunity arises to meet him, can pronounce Naji’s name correctly. Their conversation starts like a shopping list with issuing Robert requests for equipment; but the conversation becomes more interesting when it turns to the plea for an interview with Saddam.

Naji: What would be the purpose for the interview?  
 Robert: Well, I gotta tell you. I think without dialogue the war is inevitable.  
 Naji: Yes, but not dialogue is possible. Your government and the Zionists have blackmailed the United Nations. Are you a Zionist?  
 Robert: No. I’m not.  
 Naji: You depicted President Hussein as a hostage taker. These people were his guests, nothing more.  
 Robert: The President got his message out.  
 Naji: No, you got your message out.

Robert: The Koran says confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth. Can we at least agree on that guiding philosophy?

Naji: Do you think I am so naïve as to be charmed by a fortunate turn of memory?

Robert: I lucked out. That's the only quote I remember from college, that and the impression of the profound human document.

Naji: Divine?.....Why would President Saddam Hussein do CNN?

Robert: Because we're the only network with global outreach, because we're in every foreign ministry, and because he watches it.

Naji: (Reaches for a remote control and turns the only TV that is off, out of three, back on. It is tuned to CNN). What would be the interview's length?

In this scene we see the first interplay of dialogue represented on a personal and public level in the conflict between Iraq and the United States. Naji and Robert take up a dialogue that Robert later refers to as a "connection." On a personal level he trusts Naji and it makes his interaction with him simpler. At the same time Robert is trying to structure public dialogue with Iraq and the United States through this interaction with Naji. "Without dialogue the war is inevitable" will not be the last time Robert talks about the role of public dialogue, so this section is an opportunity to examine the many voices involved in his desire for dialogue.

The first voice that plays a role in Robert's quest for dialogue is the voice that sent him to Baghdad, CNN. In this case, CNN is a superaddressee, because it is imperative that the network approves everything he does. When he finishes the Stuart Lockwood story he is right out the next day to "feed the beast." He realizes that he needs fresh, new, compelling stories everyday to keep his job and prove his worth. It is a pressure that is constantly hanging over him and a motivator for getting an interview with Saddam. Robert knows that an interview would skyrocket ratings for the network, and improve his credibility with the new boss in charge of CNN. An interview with Saddam would be a huge career boost.

It is evident that Robert is looking for something more than a career boost; he wants to play a role in this war. He sees his role as facilitating dialogue, and knows for that to happen he will need Naji as an ally. He even plays into Naji's religious beliefs in the Koran and his sense

of career advancement in their conversation. Robert plays into the fact that CNN has benefits for Naji that other networks cannot offer. Robert obviously knows the voices of addressivity and the present other.

In acknowledging the voice of addressivity in Naji, Robert seems to get a desired response. Naji is savvy and realizes the multiple voices that both he and Robert must acknowledge. He also knows that a relationship with Robert can be mutually beneficial. The lingering question is if he hopes to engage in dialogue. In the next scene, Ingrid brings up the point that, “you don’t get to where he is without doing some pretty heinous stuff.” It is just that which makes us wonder Naji’s motivations.

### **The Role that Dialogue Plays**

The evolution of the relationship continues when suddenly CBS, not CNN, receives the right to interview Saddam. Robert clicks on the television and sees his Saddam Hussein interview being done by Dan Rather. In protest, he returns to Naji’s office to confront him. As the relationship develops both parties have begun to trust each other. It is with that trust in mind that Robert accepts Naji’s proposal to be the first media crew into Kuwait since the invasion. This not only helps Robert address the voice of the CNN headquarters, but seems to be an olive branch from Naji for giving the Hussein interview to CBS.

Once in Kuwait, Robert realizes the story in Kuwait is a clever trick. Iraq sent CNN to Kuwait under one stipulation; they can only cover a story on the allegations that Iraqi soldiers were taking Kuwaiti babies off heart monitors and allowing them to die. They are told they will visit three hospitals, but when they arrive in Kuwait they barely get to visit one before the Iraq troops step in. As they return to the airport, they hear on the radio that they have reported that allegations are false. Not only have they not even filed a story, but now they have become the

story. Upon returning to Baghdad, they are swarmed by other journalists. Realizing Naji and the Iraqi government used them, Robert goes to confront Naji in an Iraqi public square.

Robert: I trusted you.  
 Naji: I did what I had to do.  
 Robert: No, you set me up.  
 Naji: All governments use the press.  
 Robert: Bullshit, that's too easy.  
 Naji: No, that's reality. I use you and you use me. We're the same.  
 Robert: Oh really? Well, I'll tell you what. I'm trying to cut through this bullshit and I'm trying to have an honest conversation.  
 Naji: Alright!  
 Robert: Yeah.  
 Naji: You want honest?  
 Robert: Yeah.  
 Naji: Alright. The American people don't care about the people of Kuwait. This is about oil for you. For us, we care about very different issues: dignity, pride. Much more important to us than oil. More important to us than survival in this mortal realm.  
 Robert: Ok, ok. So, straighten us out then.  
 Naji: Alright. An English general carved off a piece from our country after World War I and called it Kuwait. There is a history in this region about which you know nothing.  
 Robert: Ok, so straighten us out Naji. If we're getting it wrong put President Saddam Hussein on the air and let him tell us what we're doing wrong. My people don't understand your people, so put your man on the air.  
 Naji: We did that with CBS, it changed nothing.  
 Robert: No, you've got to keep doing it. You just can't walk away. Think about what's at stake here, Naji. Think about what we're talking about. People are gonna die. People are going to die. And I'll tell you exactly when they're going to die. They're going to die when the talking stops. So, we've got to keep talking. You and me got to keep talking. We got to keep talking until we're old men. Okay? Because soon as the talking stops, we're dead. Look, maybe I'll never understand you. Maybe we're not supposed to understand each other, but as long as we stay talking we stay alive. It's worth an interview.

For the first time, we see a flip in both aspects of dialogue addressed in this movie. We see the interpersonal dialogue between Naji and Robert suffer a severe blow because Robert feels used. In contrast, we begin to see potential of public dialogue between Iraq and the United States. This conversation is a major turning point in the movie and its representation of dialogue.

The first representation of dialogue this scene addresses is the dialogue between Robert and Naji. Buber calls genuine dialogue *I-Thou*, while Bakhtin refers to it as the *aesthetic moment*. One aspect both agree is that this type of dialogue, the *I-Thou* and *aesthetic moment*, is not sustainable. Buber would say that even with our best friends we sometimes objectify others as a means to an end, which he defines as the *I-It* relationship. Bakhtin views the *aesthetic moment* as fleeting. Therefore, it is outside the realm possibility that genuine dialogue occurs in moments between Robert and Naji, as we have seen.

In this excerpt, Naji objectifies Robert as a journalist. Naji uses their relationship in order to deal with the voice of the superaddressee, who in most of their conversations to this point is Saddam. The Kuwait story is propaganda for Iraq, and if reported any other way, Naji would have to throw Robert out of the country. It has happened to many other media outlets before this incident, and Robert knows that it can happen to him. Relationship or not, both still have a job to do.

Robert takes the Kuwait story with blind trust in Naji, and out of a need to address his superaddressee in Atlanta. Almost his entire staff questions the decision to limit their reporting to the Kuwaiti hospitals, but Robert is their leader and his say is final. He realizes that following CBS interview of Saddam he needs to come up with something bigger and better. The only story that will due is waiting in Kuwait. It is this acknowledgement that leads Hallin (1987) to mistrust the media. Robert is constantly receiving pressure from his bosses at CNN headquarters to scoop news stories from other networks. The content of the stories is not important, but how quickly he can get it on the air. So, without the support of his crew he gets stonewalled in Kuwait and smeared the credibility of the network. One of his bosses in Atlanta refers to this as the “darkest day in the history of the network.”

In the face of the biggest setback for both his career and dialogue with Naji, Robert makes the best case for media's role in dialogue in the movie. He sees a need for talking between Iraqi and American people, and thinks he can serve as mediator. Young (1991) would see Robert as taking the media to an active role in conflict resolution by trying to engage the Iraqis. The history of this region could help to, as Manoff (1998) has noted, humanize these people. It is much easier to objectify an opponent in war than to think of them another human being. On top of that, Robert proposes that just continuing the process of dialogue keeps everyone alive.

It is important to note that this stroke of genius about the role of dialogue could have also been a stroke of luck that saves his job. By framing an interview with Saddam from this perspective he gets the interview; and after repeated failures, getting the interview is the first real break that he gets. Nevertheless, the point he make is still valid. Young (1991) argues that sometimes the media can be the only venue through which world leaders can address each other. The chances of Saddam and George Bush sitting down and engaging in face to face dialogue are slim, but the media is a place where both their messages can be heard. The problem is whether Saddam and George Bush want to listen to each other. If they do not want to listen, maybe the people of their respective countries do. The best part of a media message is the possibility to reach a number of audiences and allowing them to come to their own conclusions. This is the type of mentality that Robert addresses with his plea to Naji, but with war looming, it may be too late.

### **Trusting the Audience**

However, it turns out not to be too late. Robert gets his interview with Saddam, but fears that nothing new has come of it. As the war begins to escalate, Iraq releases the American

hostages and among them is Vinton. While Vinton's release is a colossal, personal relief for Robert, Vinton doesn't even seem to remember him. Later that evening, Robert begins to talk to Ingrid while overlooking Iraq's preparations for the war.

- Ingrid: Oh, that's scary. You know they're talking through us now. Both sides, they're talking through CNN.
- Robert: Yeah, they're talking, but they're not listening. What the fuck are we doing here?
- Ingrid: Uh, it's called our job, Wienerish.
- Robert: Really? Rapid sound bites. We got a little sound bite of Saddam. We got a little sound bite of Bush. That's not enough.
- Ingrid: What happened to trusting the audience?
- Robert: What if you don't give them the tools they need to understand the story? We've got a role to play here.
- Ingrid: We don't solve the world's problems, we report them.
- Robert: Really, is that what it has come down to? Just keep those cameras rolling and wait for the bombs to drop. Nice fucking job.

We can sense the frustration Robert feels as he questions and searches for the role of media. Although Ingrid says that the media's place is to objectively report the events as they happen, Robert feels a deeper obligation to his job. Media does more than just report events, but for Robert, also has the opportunity to serve as a mediator of dialogue. He knows that the media has the potential to serve as third party mediator between Iraq and the United States to lead to a greater understanding and deter a looming war. For Robert it his obligation as a journalist to give both sides the information each needs to avoid war and come to a peaceful resolution. What they have done thus far to supercede this and facilitate dialogue is not enough.

In their discussion, Robert and Ingrid examine the role of the audience in relation to the media. Robert feels that in order for the audience to understand we need to give them the context surrounding the story. This is a significant change in perspective from his reporting of the Stuart Lockwood story. Robert now sees how important painting a more vivid picture can be for understanding. Carey (1992) sees the media creating culture and bringing the world together, but this cannot succeed unless we have the tools with which to understand each other. Sound

bites are not enough; the audience needs information to understand the opposing side. Robert realizes that CNN cannot mediate a dialogue between the two nations with a minuscule amount of information.

One of the fundamental aspects of this mediated dialogue is trust. If the audience genuinely trusts what the media reports, then the audience will be open to listening. Robert understands that in order for this airing of voices to be considered dialogue, each must listen to the other. Young (1991) sees the influence the kind of media that Robert is striving for can have. He feels it is the media's role to provide the circumstances for each to listen, thereby creating successful public dialogue.

Robert wrestles with a complex web of voices in his struggle to solidify media's role in dialogue between Iraq and the United States. He hears the voice of history; two opposing sides embedded with hatred due to centuries of disagreements. He also stands in the middle of the present other, embedded in reported speech as a struggle of he said/she said between the two countries. He also must answer to the voices of his superaddressees; his audience, his government, and his bosses at CNN, who expect him to be the first to get the story, no matter what the sacrifice.

Most importantly by trusting the audience we can apply the concept of Roeh and Cohen's (1992) open and closed media. In keeping the media open, we allow the audience to interpret and participate in what the media says by "filling in the blanks." This process allows for greater dialogue. It is putting information on the table and letting others feel ownership. By telling the audience everything, the media cuts off audience participation, which is an essential part of dialogue.

#### **Four-Wire**

As the movie continues to develop, the reporters bond as the war becomes imminent. In the midst of all of this, Naji grants CNN use of a four-wire. A four wire allows the crew in Baghdad to communicate directly with headquarters in Atlanta, but the Iraqi government thinks they are talking to the CNN bureau in Iman. The four-wire is also on its own telecommunications grid, which means in case of attack, CNN will be the only network able to broadcast. Over drinks at a public restaurant, Naji confronts Robert with this during a casual, friendly conversation.

Naji: You deceived us.  
 Robert: What do you mean?  
 Naji: The four wire, it allows you to speak directly to Atlanta.  
 Robert: How'd you find out?  
 Naji: We are the ministry of information.  
 Robert: You gonna take it back?  
 Naji: No, we trust you. To use it responsibly. (Pause) Does that make you uneasy?  
 Robert: No.  
 Naji: We keep them talking there is still hope. Isn't that what you said?  
 Robert: Chala  
 Naji: God willing.

Again we can see the evolution of dialogue on a private level with tension building on the public level. This conversation between Naji and Robert contains multiple voices described by Baxter. Naji's comment is more than just a direct statement of Robert's deception, but of the two opposing sides in the looming war. As they converse the troops begin to prepare the city for war. Naji is caught between the man that he knows and the culture he represents. Naji decides to put faith in man.

There is awkwardness when Naji expresses his trust in Robert. The voices of superaddressees weigh heavy on their minds. Robert does not know how to feel about being trusted by the Iraqi government. To this point in Robert's experience the only people trusted by Saddam's regime are those who produced his propaganda. Robert is stuck in the tension of

whether he has strived to be so unbiased that he has become biased towards the Iraqis. Going back in the movie there are many situations where CNN has been criticized for being for Saddam, to the extent that a note saying “CNN The voice of Iraq” was left on their hotel suite door. Their patriotism has been questioned on many occasions.

The tension of bias and the question of patriotism are important issues when thinking about the voice of the superaddressee. To truly mediate public dialogue CNN must be free to lend voice to all of the sides involved. Robert is not free of those burdens. He is socially tied to his culture and it is within his culture that his message is heard. The best he can do is engage Americans with as complete a message as possible, in order to as Naji says “keep them talking.” It is his social responsibility if his goal is public dialogue.

The ending toast between Robert and Naji exudes the voice of social languages. Robert chooses to use the toast of the Arabic people, and the voice of their social languages to display the respect and understanding he has for them. Naji returns this with the English equivalent to show that the understanding and respect is mutual, they are friends.

Friends

The attack on Iraq commences and because of the four wire CNN is the only network with the technological capability to cover it. CNN becomes the world news leader overnight. The following morning, the four wire is confiscated, but the coverage of the night’s attack is enough to declare CNN the clear winner in war coverage. Two weeks of attacks go by and as the dust settles on a decimated Iraq, Robert finally decides to go home. Before leaving he has one more conversation with Naji, and it occurs during a walk through the rubble that covers the city as astonished crews search for survivors.

Robert: Your family?

Naji: They’re safe. Thank you. So, you’re leaving?

Robert: Yeah, it's time for me to go.  
 Naji: And we have become friends.  
 Robert: Yeah. (Pause) You kept your word and you've been fair. I can't ask for more than that from a friend.  
 Naji: And you got your story.  
 Robert: (As he surveys the rubble) Yeah, not the one I wanted.  
 Naji: Isn't it? (Long pause) I will see you when this war is over.... (Naji walks away as the movie ends).

On the surface, this conversation doesn't seem crucially instrumental as an example of dialogue. However, it is through the evolution of the movie that we can understand the significance of this conversation. On the public level, it is obvious to see that Robert's hope to mediate dialogue between the United States and Iraq has failed. The war-torn streets and the smoldering rubble are the outcome of CNN attempting to fulfill the role of mediator between Iraq and the United States. But underlying, we have an example of a successful dialogic relationship on the private or interpersonal level.

The important aspect about this conversation is not the voices that are present, but which one is muted. This is a conversation between two men that are relating to each other without over acknowledging their superaddressees. Robert shows genuine concern for Naji and his family, and they talk as if they are exactly what they say, "friends." Throughout the movie we see two individuals, who by design should despise each other because of their citizenship to warring factions, but who come together to form a friendship. Every encounter between Robert and Naji advances their knowledge of each other, which is exactly what Buber requires for genuine dialogue. It is to walk away from the moment having learned something about someone or something. As mentioned, it is more than just learning about something, but about listening to and understanding the many voices embedded with their conversations.

However, doubts do exist about the genuineness of their dialogue. As Naji points out, Robert really wanted the story and to put CNN on the map. He indicates this with his remark to

Robert, that “you got your story.” This is exactly what Buber meant by the *I-It* versus the *I-Thou* relationship. We can’t always maintain an *I-Thou* relationship according to Buber, and the *I-It* relationship is useful. Robert and Naji’s dialogue reflects the need to see the other a means to an end, while also being able to listen and learn from one another.

### **Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, our representation of dialogue borrows characteristics from Linder, Buber, Friedman, and Bakhtin. It is a call to action, maintaining a position or idea, while genuinely turning towards another and listening to the multiple and complex voices of conversation. *Live from Baghdad* provides excellent examples of our posited definition of dialogue, specifically on an interpersonal level. However, on a broader scale, does *Live from Baghdad* teach us anything about the media’s role in public dialogue? Furthermore, what voices co-exist within the media’s messages to facilitate this public dialogue?

*Live from Baghdad* makes it decisively clear that Robert Wiener intended the media’s messages to create a public dialogue which would be a deterrent to war. From “we’ve got a role to play here” and “we’ve got to keep talking,” Robert clearly sees his and CNN’s role in this conflict as a mediator of public dialogue. Botes, Evans, and Young would agree with Robert; the media has a greater responsibility than just reporting.

It is interesting to note that not all media participants view their role as multi-sided. In numerous discussions with Ingrid and the CNN headquarters, it is obvious they see themselves in the traditional role of reporting the facts. Ingrid even remarks, “we don’t solve the world’s problems, we report them,” which is indicative of her standpoint on their role in the crisis. Although the goal of this study was look at the media’s role in dialogue, any attempt would have

to be seen as unsuccessful due to the ensuing war. However, it is still important to examine Bahktin's use of voice in dialogue, which did occur throughout the movie.

We can definitely see dialogue in the rapport between Robert and Ingrid, as well as with Robert and Naji. Robert and Ingrid are able to stand on different sides of an issue, while also being able to listen and respect each other. While disagreeing on the goals of their assignment, each attempts to understand the other's perspective. Ingrid's open view of the media troubles Robert who ponders how open is too open. Even with divergent ideas, the connection between Robert and Ingrid is displayed in their willingness to dialogue.

Robert and Naji do not have the history of Robert and Ingrid, but they do provide us with some of the most fruitful examples of dialogue in the movie. Robert and Naji, see each other, at times, as a means to an end. Each is an avenue for Iraqi propaganda or a provider of a four wire. It is in these moments that the voices of the superaddressee, history, social languages, addressivity, present other, and immediate speaker are all present. The voice of the superaddressee is an indirect acknowledgement to the role that media and government play in their conversations.

However, as we can examine the voices in Robert's relationships, one limitation of the study is that the movie only examples of the voices behind the media message. CNN is an outlet for reported speech, and we never get to see reacting from the people to which those voices are reporting. Bahktin addresses report speech as second hand speech. Instead of hearing information directly from the source, we hear it from a reporter or in this case edited in a studio. Robert talks about this phenomenon in the movie when he refers to "rapid sound bites." The problem he has is that he wonders if this style is enough. Roeh and Cohen claim that the open style of reporting to which Robert has been aspiring in this movie leave room for public

interpretation and dialogue. Young (1991) takes the point a step further, and would argue that by presenting an the story openly CNN is taking an active role in engaging the public. In this manner, we can infer from the movie that the type of reporting for which Robert is striving would be successful in engaging Americans in a dialogue about Iraq. Unfortunately, it was not able to engage the government of America into a true dialogue with the government of Iraq.

### Limitations

Like with the case of the effectiveness of dialogue preventing war, in any study there are limitations to what is seen or presented. In this study, we must point out that HBO, the network that produced the movie, and CNN are both Time Warner companies. The people at HBO have an invested stake in the success of CNN. Ralske (2002) argues that the movie is a propaganda film for CNN, but this view of the movie only strengthened our intent to analyze it. If this is how the media idealizes itself, then at least we know that a goal of the media is to promote dialogue. Included in all the voices that create the news, one is a desire to create dialogue.

It is important to understand the goals behind what media reports and the voices involved in their stories. *Live from Baghdad* provides the viewer with an insider's perspective from the eyes of the producer. The movie projects a sense of altruism not often embodied in stories of the media. We get a sense from the movie that; not only is public dialogue important, it is important to CNN producer Robert Wiener.

## References

- Anderson, R. (1994). Anonymity, presence, and the dialogic self in a technological culture. In R. Anderson, K.N. Cissna, & R.C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 91-110). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc.
- Bakhtin, M. M. & Medvedev, P. M. (1985). *The formal method in literary scholarship: A critical introduction to sociological poetics*.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1993). *Toward a philosophy of the act*.
- Baxter, L. (2003, March). A Bakhtin primer: Concepts and questions to ask of discourse when conducting a Bakhtinian analysis. In R. Anderson (professor), *Cultural and Public Dialogue*. Class conducted at Saint Louis University.
- Baxter, L. (in press). Dialogues of relating.
- Baynes, K. (1994). Communicative ethics, the public sphere and communication media. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11, 315-326.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1994). Real talk, silence, and conflict. In R. Anderson, K.N. Cissna, & R.C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 9-30). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press Inc.
- Botes, J. (1996). Journalism and conflict resolution. Retrieved February 21, 2003, from [www.wacc.org.uk/publications/md/md1996-4/botes.html](http://www.wacc.org.uk/publications/md/md1996-4/botes.html).
- Buber, M. (2000). *I and thou*. (R. G. Smith, Trans. & Intro.). New York: Scribner Classics.
- Buckingham, D. (1999). Young people, politics and news media: Beyond political socialization. *Oxford Review of Education*, 25(1/2), 171-184.
- Buckman, A. (Dec. 5, 2002). Beautiful Baghdad. New York Post, [www.nypost.com](http://www.nypost.com). Retrieved February 21, 2003.

- Carey, J. (1992). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Carruthers, S.L. (2000). *The media at war: Communication and conflict in the twentieth century*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Cissna, K. N. & Anderson, R. (1994). Communication and the ground of dialogue. In R. Anderson, K. N. Cissna, & R. C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 9-30). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Emerson, C. (1994). The outer world and inner speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the internalization of language. In R. Anderson, K. N. Cissna, & R. C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 205-226). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Evans, K.G. (2001). Dewey and the dialogical process: Speaking, listening and today's media. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24, 7, 771-791.
- Ferrarotti, F. (1988). *The end of conversation: The impact of mass media on modern society*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Fiske, J. & Hartley, J. (1989). *Reading television*. London: Routledge.
- Friedman, W. (1994). The partnership of existence. In R. Anderson, K. N. Cissna, & R. C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 9-30). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Habermas, J. (1979) *Communication and the evolution of society*. (T. McCarthy. trans.& intro) Beacon: Boston.
- Hallin, D. C. (1987). The American news media: a critical theory perspective. *Mass Communication Review Yearbook*, 6, 293-315.

- Hallin, D.C. (1994). *We keep American on top of the world: Television journalism and the public sphere*. London: Routledge.
- Ihde, D. (1994). The polyphony of experience. In R. Anderson, K. N. Cissna, & R. C. Arnett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community* (pp. 201-204). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Jensen, E. (Dec. 6, 2002). The monopoly is a memory. *Los Angeles Times*, [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), Retrieved February, 21, 2003.
- Kelleher, T. (December 9, 2002). Live from Baghdad. Retrieved on February 25, 2003, from <http://80-proquest.umi.compiusezp.slu.edu>.
- Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture*. London: Routledge.
- Liebes, T. (1992). Our war/their war: Comparing the *Intifadeh* and the gulf war on U.S. and Israeli television. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9, 44-55.
- Linder, S.H. (2001). An inquiry into dialogue, its challenges and justification. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24, 7, 651-675.
- Manoff, R. K. (1998). The media's role in preventing and moderating conflict. Retrieved on February 21, 2003, from [www.colorado.edu/conflict](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict).
- Mathews, D. (1999). *Politics for people: Finding a responsible public voice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Newcomb, H. (1984). On the dialogic aspects of mass communications. *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*, 1, 34-50.
- Olson, S.R. (1994). *Renewed alchemy: Science and humanism in communication*

- epistemology. In F. L. Casmir (Ed.), *Building communication theories: A sociocultural approach*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ong, W. (1981). *Fighting for life: Contest, sexuality, and consciousness*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Parenti, M. (1992). *Make believe media: The politics of entertainment*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Ralske, J. (2002). MSN Entertainment: Movies – Live from Baghdad. Retrieved February 21, 2003. From <http://entertainment.msn.com/Movies/Movie.aspx%3Fm%3D535159>
- Roeh, I. & Cohen, A. A. (1992). One of the bloodiest days: A comparative analysis of open and closed television news. *Journal of Communication*, 42(2), 42-55.
- Rosenberg, H. (Dec. 6, 2002). 'Baghdad': When CNN was the news. Los Angeles Times, [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com). Retrieved February 21, 2003.
- Shah, D. V., Watts, M. D., Domke, D., & Fan, D. P. (2002). News framing and cueing of issue regimes: Explaining Clinton's public approval in spite of scandal. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66(3), 339-370.
- Tannen, D. (1998). *The argument culture: Moving from debate to dialogue*. New York: Random House.
- Thrall, A. T. (2000). *War in the media age*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Wiener, R. (1992). *Live from Baghdad: Gathering news at ground zero*. NY: Doubleday.
- Wilson, W. J. (1998). Engaging publics in sociological dialogue through the media. *Contemporary Sociology*, 27(5), 435-438.
- Wood, H. (1976). Television as a dream. In R. Adler & D. Cater (Eds.), *Television as a Cultural Force* (pp. 17-35). New York, NY: Praeger.
- Young, C. (1991). The role of media in international conflict. Retrieved February 21, 2003,

from [www.colorado.edu/conflict](http://www.colorado.edu/conflict).

Zelizer, B. (1992). CNN, the gulf war, and journalistic practice. *Journal of Communication*, 42 (1), 66-81.